

ARMY  NAVY

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FLYING STORIES

FALL
ISSUE

TEAMWORK
AND AIR
POWER

By LT. COL.
CHAS. W.
KERWOOD

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

FEATURING

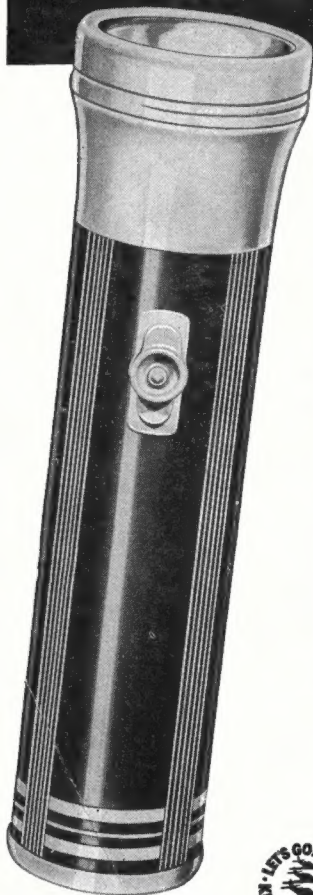
BLUE WATER PILOTS

A Complete Novel of Canal Zone Menace

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



New! SPECIAL EVEREADY FLASHLIGHT TRADE-MARK FOR CIVILIAN WARTIME USE!



Made of special 5-ply fibre, new laboratory-tested design saves copper, brass, nickel, chromium and other metals vital to war use!



STRONG! . . . Made of special fibre sheets, tightly laminated in 5 layers, the tube is tough and hard. It will give long years of service!



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LONG LASTING! . . . Drop it on concrete floor—this flashlight case can "take" ordinary abuse. It's actually more durable than millions of flashlights now in use.

METALS HAVE GONE TO WAR!

But metals or no metals, America needs flashlights . . . at home, in business, on the farm, in the factory . . . needs them for a thousand vital civilian uses.

And America shall have them!

This national need—made more pressing than ever by wartime emergency conditions—has been answered by the world's largest

flashlight-and-battery laboratory.

Here it is—the new "Eveready" flashlight made of tough, 5-ply fibre—tested and proven under severest laboratory conditions.

Yet it is made virtually *without* the use of metal. Soon available at all dealers!



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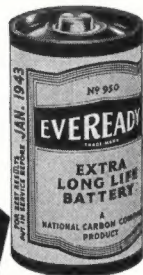
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The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Company, Inc.

Keep flashlights loaded with dependable fresh DATED "Eveready" batteries—and have an extra set on hand for your light in case of long-continued use.

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER . . .
Look for the DATE-LINE



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GOING TO DO TO
HELP?



**I Am Ready to
HELP YOU
Help
WIN THE WAR**

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around the house into price-
less knowledge which will
serve you all your life.*

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CRIME"**

Gives the case histories of famous crimes and how they were solved by experts. This book has been an "eye-opener" to thousands. It told them how they could prepare themselves at small cost and in short time to fill good-pay, responsible positions in Identification Work. Send for it FREE today, stating age.

**This May Be Your Opportunity for
HELPING TO WIN THE WAR!!**

You're a good loyal American; you want to do your part! All of us can't be soldiers, or sailors, or air pilots, but we can serve. One way to do it is to master a trade or vocation which will help win the war and at the same time prepare you for a good position after the war is over.

CRIME IS AN ENEMY

Training which enables you to thwart crime within our own borders will help to win the war with the Japs and other foreign foes. You'll get such training through the I.A.S. Course in Finger Printing and other Crime Detection Methods, and you can *learn right at home*, in spare time, at small cost.

For 26 years the I.A.S. has been preparing ambitious men to fill responsible positions in Identification Bureaus throughout America. Today over 43 per cent of all the Nation's Identification Bureaus are run by our graduates.

Fascinating—Thrilling—Profitable

Scientific crime detection offers excellent opportunities now . . . and the future promises even greater possibilities. A recent Gallup poll shows that 69% of America's population wants every one in the U.S. to be finger printed *right now*. Hundreds of Defense Plants are now finger printing employees. The potential value of finger print training grows day by day.

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Now . . . when the demand for our graduates is greater than ever before . . . when new Bureaus and National Defense are finding need of more and more trained finger print experts . . . makes the present time the ideal time to get into this pleasant, profitable, thrilling work.

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VOL. 1
NO. 2

ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES

EVERY
STORY
NEW

TEAMWORK AND AIR POWER

*A Personal Message to the
Readers of This
Magazine*

By

Lt. Col. CHARLES
WAYNE KERWOOD

Chief, Theatre of Operations,
European Section,
Military Intelligence Service,
U. S. War Department General Staff

THERE once was a time when air warfare was a highly individualistic affair. The pilot was the "Knight of the Skies," and, like jousts of old, his battles usually were individual encounters.

But all that is changed now. Air Warfare is incredibly more complex than it was in World War I. Bombing, and lots of it, is the keynote to Victory.

We have the finest bombers in the world. We also have the finest flyers in the world. And they are trained, not only in the exact performance of their individual duties, but also to work as a team.

No one man in bomber aircrew is "most" important. All are indispensable, for each man has a vital job to do.

America intends to be supreme in the air, and teamwork is one means of accomplishing that end.

FEATURED COMPLETE NOVEL

BLUE WATER PILOTS

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

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Best Readers' Letters

ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES published quarterly and copyright, 1942, by Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Single copies, 10 cents; yearly subscription (four issues), 40 cents. Entry for second-class matter pending at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. September, 1942, issue. Companion magazines: Air War, The American Eagle, Sky Fighters, Texas Rangers, G-Men Detective, Detective Novels Magazine, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Love, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Football, Popular Western, Popular Detective, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Love, The Phantom Detective, Everyday Astrology, Masked Rider Western, Range Riders Western, The Rio Kid Western, Captain Futura, Black Book Detective, The Masked Detective, Startling Stories, R A F Aces, Popular Crossword Puzzles, Best Crossword Puzzles, Rodeo Romances, Exciting Navy Stories, Exciting Love, Exciting Sports, Exciting Detective, Exciting Westerns, and West. PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.



EARN A RADIO TECHNICIAN'S PAY

IF you still have a low pay job—if the War has cut instead of jumped your pay—or if you now have a War job that you know won't last—take a tip from the hundreds of men who have jumped their pay by training at home in spare time to become Radio Technicians. Today these men enjoy good civilian and military jobs in a field with a bright peace-time future.

Here Is a Tested Way to Begin Earning More Money Quickly

Radio offers you the opportunity to make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time a few months from now and to prepare for good full time Radio jobs paying up to \$50 a week. **MAIL THE COUPON.** Get the facts about how to learn jobs like these at home.

Why Radio Technicians Can Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

The Radio repair business is booming because manufacturers have stopped making new home

and auto Radios and the country's 57,400,000 sets are getting older, requiring more repairs, new tubes, parts. This is opening new opportunities for full time and part time Radio Technicians to get good jobs, or to open their own Radio repair businesses. Radio Technicians and Operators hold good jobs in the country's 882 Broadcasting Stations and in Aviation, Police, Commercial, Marine Radio. Loud Speaker Systems give good jobs to many. The Government is calling for Civilian Radio Operators and Technicians. Military orders for tremendous quantities of Radio equipment are keeping Radio factories busy, opening more good job opportunities. Men who know Radio are in line for extra rank and pay in the Army and Navy. Radio developments such as Television and Frequency Modulation, held back by the War, make Radio a live-wire field for the future.

Beginners Soon Learn to Earn \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

Due to the boom in the Radio repair business, practically every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radios. I

give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts and instructions for conducting experiments and building test equipment to help you do better, faster Radio repair work. My 50-50 method—half working with the Radio parts I send you, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating; gives you valuable practical experience.

Find Out How I Train You at Home for Good Pay in Radio

MAIL THE COUPON. I'll send my 64-page Book FREE. It tells about my Course; the present and future jobs in different branches of Radio; the many calls for Radio Technicians today. Read letters from more than 100 men I have trained so you can see what they are doing and earning. **MAIL THE COUPON** in an envelope or pasted on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 2J09, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

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THIS FREE BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY

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Mail me FREE, without obligation, your big 64-page book about present and future opportunities in Radio and how you train me for them.

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Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....



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Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to several times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. **IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!**



Plays on Radio

"I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio stations. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course."

*W. H. S., Alabama.



Found Accordion Easy

"I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes *H. E. from Canada. "But thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction."

* Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional Models.

DO YOU PLAY?

Say "Yes" Next Time They Ask!

Surprise your friends! Learn to play the piano or other musical instruments this quick, easy way. First lesson starts you playing real tune.

YOU'VE often been asked that question: "Do you play?" Everybody looks at you expectantly, waiting for you to sit down at the piano and entertain the crowd. Are you compelled to embarrass yourself and throw cold water on the party by saying "No"?

What a difference it would make if you could say "Yes". Think of the good times and popularity in store if you could only play the piano or some other musical instrument—the guitar, violin, accordion, saxophone or whichever one happens to be your favorite.

Well, you **CAN**. You can learn to play any musical instrument you please. You can do it by a method that's **EASIER AND QUICKER** than you perhaps ever thought possible. It takes only a few minutes a day at home, at your own convenience. You save the expense of a private teacher, so the cost is trifling.

Thousands Now Play Who Never Thought They Could

Does it sound too good to be done? Then remember this: *thousands* have learned to play by this amazingly easy method. Thousands of men, women and children in all walks of life—in all parts of the world. People who had never played before, who knew nothing about music and had no special talent.

Imagine their joy, when, in a remarkable short time, they found themselves actually **PLAYING**! Imagine the astonishment of their friends! No wonder the fame of this amazing method spread, until today, over 700,000 people all over the world have enrolled for it.

Music Made Easy as A-B-C

How is it possible to learn music so easily? What is this famous U. S. School method of home instruction? Here is the secret: this modern, short-cut method skips the tedious drudgery of old-fashioned methods. Instead, it starts you playing—a simple, popular tune in your very first lesson, another in your second lesson and so on. Fascinating print-and-picture lessons make everything clear. You see what to do—you can't go wrong.

Send For Booklet With Print and Picture Sample

If you would sincerely like to play a musical instrument, you will be thrilled by the free illustrated booklet and Print and Picture Sample that tells how easily you can learn. Mail the coupon or write for them today, mentioning the instrument in which you are interested. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) Address: U. S. School of Music, 2949 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.

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Piano	Saxophone	Cornet
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Guitar	Trombone	Plain Accordion
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Mandolin	Ukulele	Other Instrument

Name

Street

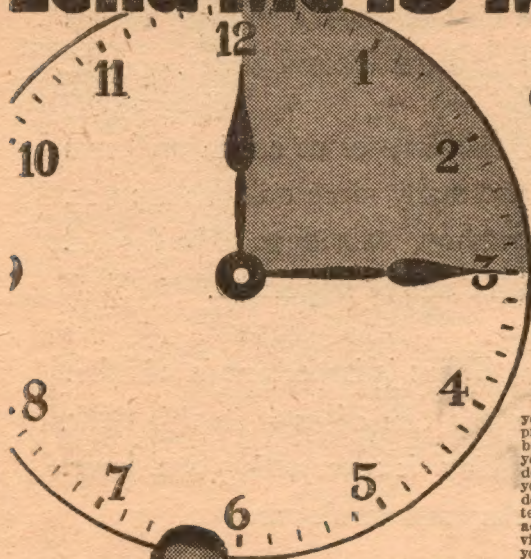
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**..and I'll prove
I can make you
a NEW MAN**



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Among all the physical instructors and "conditioners of men" **ONLY ONE NAME STANDS OUT.** That name is **Charles Atlas!**

In every part of the country Charles Atlas is recognized as "America's Greatest Builder of Men." Almost two million men have written to him. Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his hands!

And now that the call is for men capable of helping America meet and conquer any national emergency, many thousands of others (even those already in their country's Army and Navy) are calling upon Charles Atlas to build the kind of men America vitally needs.

Here's **PROOF** Right Here!

"Results come so fast by your method that it seems just as if some magician put on the pounds of solid muscle just where you want them."
—W. L., Missouri

"Feel like a million dollars and have a 44" normal chest —A 2" GAIN!"
—L. A. S., Illinois

"My doctor thinks your course is fine. Have put two inches on my chest and ½ inch on my neck."
—B. L., Oregon

"My muscles are bulging out and I feel like a new man. My chest measures 38 in., an increase of 5 in., and my neck increased 2 in."
—G. W., Ohio

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making **NEW MEN** of them.

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double quick time! I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE!** I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that there's not even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

I Was a 97-lb. Weakling

All the world knows I was **ONCE** a skinny, scrawny 97-pound weakling. And **NOW** it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of

other men in only 15 minutes a day? The answer is "Dynamic Tension," the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

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Are you **ALL MAN**—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? Or do you need the help I can give you—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that "Dynamic Tension" can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you inside, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to **LIVE!**

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Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you exactly what "Dynamic Tension" can do. And it's packed with pictures that **SHOW** you what it does. Results it has produced for other men. **RESULTS** I want to prove it can get for **YOU!** If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a **NEW MAN**, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then **man!**—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! **CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 77-Y, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

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**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-Y,
115 East 23rd St., New York City**

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name
(Please Print or Write Plainly)

Address

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LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT



THIS WAR is being fought by a big Army. It's an army that is called the United States.

Millions of us are in uniforms and many more millions are not, but how we happen to be dressed isn't what's important.

What is important is whether every one of us is in this fight, giving it everything we have. Any less won't win.

Whether you're a soldier on the firing line, or are backing him up as a soldier on the production line, you're fighting for the same things.

The decision, whether or not we are to live in a decent world as free men in the years to come, is in the making now. It's up to you, Soldier.

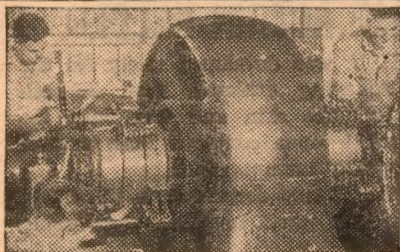
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Colonel, G.S.C.

UNITED STATES ARMY

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Everyone cannot serve in our Armed Forces . . . Some may be too young . . . others too old . . . others with dependents . . . and others with some physical defect. If you cannot serve, don't be discouraged. **FROM 16 to 50, EVERYONE WITH PROPER TRAINING CAN SERVE IN WAR INDUSTRY . . .** turning out weapons and materials. **And remember:** Electricity in war time is essentially no different from Electricity in peace time. After the war you'll be an all-around **SKILLED ELECTRICIAN** ready for a good-pay Peace-time job.



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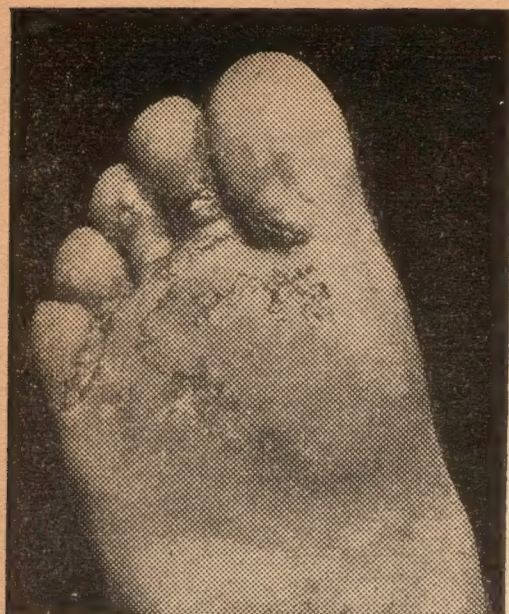
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Send me your Free Book and tell me about your plans to help me.

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ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....



FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

**Send Coupon
Don't Pay Until Relieved**

At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

DISEASE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD

The cause of the disease is not a germ as so many people think, but a vegetable growth that becomes buried beneath the outer tissues of the skin.

To obtain relief the medicine to be used must first gently dissolve or remove the outer skin and then kill the vegetable growth.

This growth is so hard to kill that a test shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy it; however, laboratory tests also show that H. F. will kill it upon contact in 15 seconds.

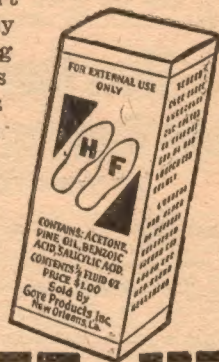
DOUBLE ACTION NEEDED

Recently H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It both gently dissolves the skin and then kills the vegetable growth upon contact. Both actions are necessary for prompt relief.

H. F. is a liquid that doesn't stain. You just paint the infected parts nightly before going to bed.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



GORE PRODUCTS, INC. T.F.

814 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

don't **Worry** about **Rupture**

• Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear? Learn now about this perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire—you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy life's normal activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture banished from your thoughts! Literally thousands of rupture sufferers have entered this Kingdom of Paradise Regained. Why not you? Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, do not despair. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives Nature a Chance to CLOSE the OPENING

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to close the opening—that holds the rupture securely but gently, day and night, at work and at play! Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectation of the writers. What is this invention—How does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Automatic Air Cushion Appliance—send now for free Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion Truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security—while the Automatic Air Cushion continually works, in its own, unique way, to help Nature get results! Learn what this patented invention can mean to you—send coupon quick!



C. E. BROOKS,
Inventor

SENT ON TRIAL!

No . . . don't order a Brooks now—FIRST get the complete revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. THEN decide whether you want the comfort—the freedom from fear and worry—the security—the same amazing results thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! Why can't you? And you risk nothing as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

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Brooks Appliance Co., 182D State St., Marshall, Mich.



PROOF!

Proof of the value and outstanding merit of the BROOKS APPLIANCE is clearly shown by the fact that over 9000 doctors have ordered it for themselves or their patients. One doctor alone has ordered for his patients over 400 Brooks Appliances. Follow your doctor's advice! If he says you have a reducible rupture and advises a proper-fitting support, don't subject yourself to further delay, which may prove dangerous, but send us your name and address immediately. Stop Your Rupture Worries! Enjoy the comfort, freedom of action and physical security which this made-to-order appliance will give you.

Mail This Coupon NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
182-D State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your FREE Book on Rupture, Proof of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

Name

Street

City State

State whether for Man ☐ Woman ☐ or Child ☐



Capt. Turnbull (1806-1900) -- like other old salts of his day -- rocked a keg of whiskey under his rocker. Its roll recaptured the motion of the wave-tossed ships on which he'd mellowed many a barrel of whiskey.

**From Mellow Whiskeys
"Rocked in the Keg" came the
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Mr. Boston knows rocking mellow's a whiskey's flavor. So he achieves Rocking Chair's richness by controlled agitation in his special blending process.



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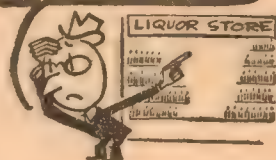
**85 Proof (80 Proof in some States)
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OLD MR. BOSTON
BRAND
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BLENDED WHISKEY



It would take
a college education
to know 'em all



**I Went Nuts
in Liquor Stores**
- by don herold

I used to go crazy in liquor stores, trying to decide which brand to buy. So many brands! The confusion is terrific for the layman liquor layer-inner.

Then a friend told me his system. He said "I've settled on Old Mr. Boston as MY brand—no matter what type of fine liquor I want."

Me—I have too, now.

It turns out that Old Mr. Boston is the one brand name under which you can buy almost every known type of fine liquor. Other big companies make many liquors, but they give them many different names. It's baffling! It's befuddling!

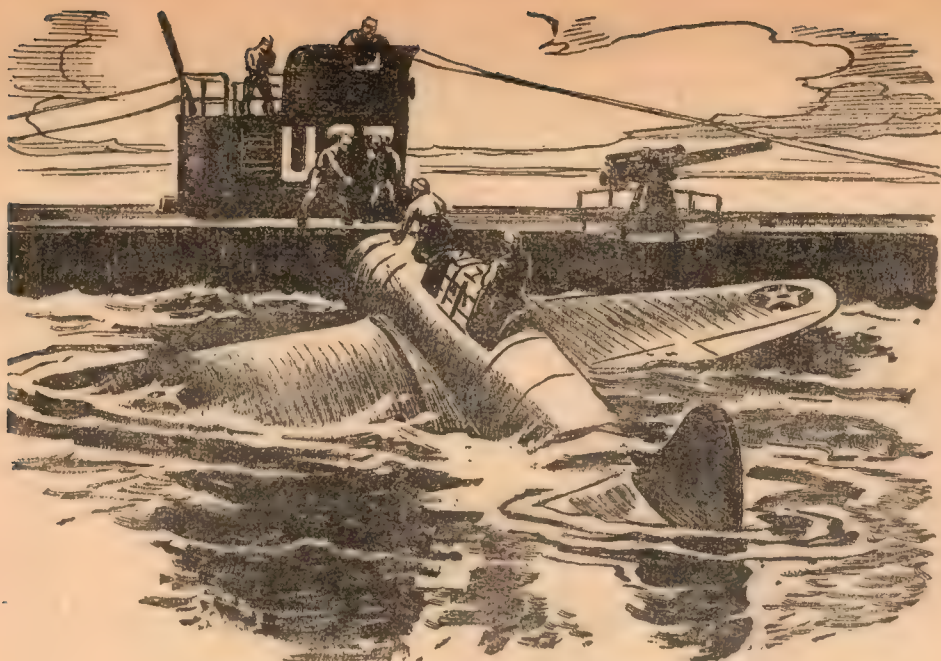
In the Old Mr. Boston line you can buy 30 different liquors, all under the one name, and all easy on the palate and pocketbook.

Old
Mr. Boston
you're
my pal



You know Boston. And you know its fine old reputation for craftsmanship. Well, you can smack a taste of the old town's 300-year-old reputation for quality in every drop of every Mr. Boston product.

So why not try the Old Mr. Herold plan and use Old Mr. Boston "as a handle by which to call your shots" when you want fine liquors?



"Climb out and come aboard!" the U-boat commander ordered

BLUE WATER PILOTS

By **ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN**

When Lieutenant Barker and his side-kick battle to defend the Canal Zone, sabotaging spies and Nazi U-Boats get a taste of what Americans mean by war!

CHAPTER I

Special Orders

COMMANDER C. K. BUCKLEY, of the Forty-ninth Scout Bomber Group, U. S. Naval Aviation, Canal Zone Area, tossed the official-looking yellow slip of paper on the Ready-Office desk, and half nodded at the two score or more eagle-eyed pilots and gunner-observers gathered about him.

"Well, there it is, fellows," he said. "Defense Operation Sixteen from

now on, and for keeps. You've all got your orders and instructions. No need to go over them again. However, there's one part I do want to repeat—and paste it in your helmets! If any of you go down—and I mean, shot down, a forced landing, or an act of God—don't let a peep about your tough luck go out over the radio."

The commander paused, fished for a cigarette, and lighted up.

"That's blamed important!" he continued, after a moment. "We don't know what enemy ships are on the

AN EXCITING COMPLETE ACTION NOVEL

waters in this neck of the world, and less about craft that may be under it. An SOS, and your position, will be heard by anybody listening in. It might be one of our own merchant ships close by. Her skipper might go soft-hearted and change course to give you aid.

"A U-boat may be waiting right there—and the loss would be more than it should have been. So remember! Use your radio *only* when you sight enemy craft, and go in to attack. There aren't to be any exceptions, no matter what. Well, shove off. Good luck, and try not to get your feet wet."

A final smile and a nod dismissed the group. Like an eager bunch of school kids busting outside for recess they went stampeding through the Ready-Office door and across the sun-flooded field of the Chagres Naval Air Station to the double row of Wright-powered Douglas "Dauntless" scout-bombers on the far side.

Two of the group that charged over to the waiting planes could well have been twins; only they weren't. Both stood five-eleven from flying boot-soles to helmet tassel. Both tipped the beam at a hundred and eighty-five in their birthday suits. And both had hard, rugged faces that would not be good for advertising Arrow collars, but which wouldn't scare little children, either.

In background and family, though, they were as opposite as the poles. Lieutenant "Jake" Barker's first toy had been a gold-plated miniature battleship given him by his grandfather, the late Vice Admiral Barker, one of Dewey's line officers. He had grown up with gold-dust, gun-powder, and salt spray in his nose, and managed not to let any of it spoil him.

He had taken his lumps at Annapolis the same as any of the other fellows, not letting the fact that his grandfather had been a vice admiral either hinder him or help him. He had graduated fourth in his class in 'Thirty-five, and had gone straight into Naval Aviation.

For the last year he had been assigned to scout-bombers. Both high rankers and low rankers alike agreed that he was tops in any kind of a sky

crate, but particularly in scout-bombers.

ENSIGN "MIKE" CHEVISKI'S father had been born in Poland, and his mother in Ireland. Mike had first seen the light of day on the tough side of Milwaukee. At five he had been living with an aunt. Flu had taken his mother and father away. From then on a smart head on his shoulders, and a hammer-head fist at the end of each arm had thought out, and pounded a way through life for him.

His football really had put him through Wisconsin. And it had been in the Navy-Wisconsin game that these two opposites had met for the first time—head-on. For a full sixty minutes they had beat the tar out of each other. And when they finally staggered off the field, with a tie score for their aches and bruises, the Fates must have decided that here was a pair that matched up good for things to come in the future.

Perhaps not, though. Perhaps it just so happened that Mike Cheviski got a sudden yen for flying in his last year at Wisconsin. Perhaps it just sort of happened that he made a forced landing at the Great Lakes Naval Air Station that day when a recruiting drive was swinging into high gear.

And perhaps, a couple of years later, some dumb Navy Bureau clerk spilled a mess of file cards and put them back in the wrong places so that Barker's and Cheviski's cards were together. At any rate they suddenly met again at the Chagres Naval Air Station, and one thing led to another so that by the time the Japs smacked Pearl Harbor they were teamed up together. And what a team!

"Oke, Mike?" Barker called back when both were in their ship, and she was quivering to go. "Got all of that hide aboard, Mister?"

"All I'm going to take!" Cheviski shouted back, and reached up to pull his glass hatch closed. "Maybe we have fun, huh?"

"And maybe this is another false alarm!" Barker growled, and put his hand on the throttle. "But remember about that radio. No tuning in Colon



"Drop your cannons and reach!" Mike Chevski's voice boomed

dance bands this trip. Keep it quiet."

"Yeah, I catch," the gunner-observer growled. "But that Madri-what's-his-name sure plays a hot lick, don't he? Me, I go for good music."

"Maybe I should have taken up music. I'da been a whizz, I got a hunch."

"As a piano mover!" Barker shot at him. "Draw in your belly! Here we go!"

The flight officer had dropped the flag before Barker's ship. He nodded and rammed open the gate at the same time. The Dauntless gave one final shake, then charged forward. A quarter run across the field and Barker pulled it up into the air.

He circled once, got his wheels up, made a radio check with the field, then swung out over the blue Caribbean on the patrol course marked on his charts. In the rear pit Cheviski loosened his helmet strap, shifted his big frame to a more comfortable position, glanced longingly at the radio, and sighed.

"How about five minutes of it, Admiral?" he said, after a long minute. "Tuning in on a station don't change anything, you know. It ain't like we were—"

"'Ain't, is right!" Barker snarled. "Good gosh, what they turn out at Wisconsin these days! Nope! You ain't tuning in, son. And you ain't going to sleep, either. You stay awake this trip, and find us a U-boat."

"A U-boat, he says!" Cheviski groaned. "The Nazis are dopes, but not dopes enough to fool around with their steel fish in these waters. Like you said, it's probably another false alarm. Or maybe in Washington they figured our jobs are too soft. So they send us a scare to keep our pants up. You know what I figure, huh?"

BARKER didn't answer for a moment. He had suddenly seen something far out across the shimmering blue of the Caribbean. He took a second look and shrugged unhappily. Curse the sun bouncing off the water! It could turn a roller into a steaming battlewagon right before your eyes. Then wash it away just as quickly.

"So what do you figure?" he said.

"This is all a Nazi trick," Cheviski said. "These Panama Canal scares that have been popping up all around. They want to keep us and the fleet units chasing around down here while they do things some place else."

"Such as where?" Barker grunted. "Come on, Master Mind! Tell me all about it."

"Aw, nuts!" Cheviski snorted. "How should I know? I ain't heard from Hitler in weeks. But, if you want my opinion, they ain't going to take any crack at the canal. They know they'd never make it."

"Okay—skip it," Barker said. "Get busy and check our course. I always like to know where I'm headed."

"Me, too, when you're up front there!" Cheviski snapped, and went to work.

An hour or so later the Dauntless was just a small dot circling about in the air between a cloudless blue sky and a glass-smooth empty blue sea that stretched to the four horizons and spilled over. Up in the Dauntless Barker and Cheviski let tired, bored eyes roam about in all directions.

Despite their attitude and posture in the pits they were still on the alert for the first sign of anything. But they were becoming more and more fed up with staring at empty blue sea and empty blue sky. And the bright hope that had burned fiercely within them when Commander Buckley had ordered this special emergency patrol for all station aircraft had fluttered down to winking spark size.

Another day, another false alarm! That's the way it had been for three weeks now. Navy Intelligence was all steamed up with suspicions of terrible things brewing. And, true enough, a few mysterious events of late did give rise to all kinds of thoughts and suspicions.

Tankers bound southward never reached the other end of the Caribbean. Three of them had just up and disappeared without leaving a trace. A fourth, and the only one to do so, managed to flash out a garbled SOS. But her position wasn't clear, and when she was finally located there were only bits of floating wreckage, and not one single live man in the water.

More important than that—at least to the Naval Air Station at Chagres, was the fact that four planes never returned from those solo scouting flights. What had happened to them was a mystery. They must have gone down, certainly, for they had not returned to base.

But no radio had been received of their going down, and that had certainly seemed to indicate they hadn't run into enemy trouble. It had probably been a forced landing made so quickly of necessity that there had been no time to flash back any word. If the engine had gone out while they had been wave-skipping for a closer look at some spot in the blue water, there naturally wouldn't have been time to get to work on the radio.

Even so, that still didn't explain anything. No trace of wreckage had been found. What's more, a Dauntless would float for six or seven hours at least, even if she did crack up. A series of feather-light dural air tanks in the wings and tail make that possible.

AND finally, where was the crash buoy that would float for days marking the general area where the plane had gone in? There hadn't been a single one of those orange-painted buoys spotted. Not one. In fact, not anything to give a clue to the loss of four planes and eight highly-trained Naval aviators!

"It's no soap, Admiral!" Cheviski's voice suddenly cut through Barker's thoughts. "We're just using up Government gas and oil. How much longer you figure to keep us out?"

Barker opened his mouth to make some kind of reply, but he swallowed the words unspoken. At that exact moment the Wright in the nose chose to start gasping and coughing. Barker's eyes flew over the instruments, but they were all in order. He jazzed the throttle and the compensator, and even switched over to the emergency tank.

But nothing did any good. The Wright sputtered a few seconds longer and then went as dead and as silent as a frozen fish.

"If this is for a scare, you can skip it!" Cheviski called out in a tight

voice. "I don't feel like being kidded today."

"You're not being kidded!" Barker snapped, and glared at the instrument panel. "This is the McCoy. Puff some air in your life-jacket, Mike. It's us this time."

CHAPTER II

Visiting Rattlesnake

BARKER caught his breath as that last remark of his faded away to the echo. He had meant it for just a wise-crack, but the sound of it in his ears suddenly made his throat go a little dry. A creepy, clammy sensation prickled the back of his neck.

For no earthly reason he could figure the Wright had pulled up cold, and the Dauntless was sliding down to sit on the stretch of sun-flooded blue water below. Was this, then, what had happened to four other planes of Forty-nine? Had they also been just sailing along, and then *bingo*—the works?

On impulse he turned around and looked at Cheviski. The former Wisconsin football star was grinning, but there was a tightness about the corners of his mouth and his eyes. And there was just the tiniest of white spots in each sun-bronzed cheek. The man met Barker's gaze for a moment, then shifted it longingly to the radio, and sighed heavily.

"The commander shouldn't have issued that order," he muttered unhappily. "Don't know as I can swim that far."

Barker made no comment. He simply shrugged and turned front to pay attention to his knitting. There was some eight thousand feet of air between the Dauntless' belly and the blue Caribbean, but for all the good that did them, as far as gliding to land was concerned, they might just as well be eight feet in the air.

Just the same, though, Barker flat-turned around toward the west and nosed in the shallowest dive possible. After all, every foot westward they traveled before they sat in the drink

might prove to be a big help later on. Just how, he didn't know, but it was better than gliding away from one source of possible rescue.

And so, holding the ship steady, he took a moment to blow air into the tube of his rubber life-jacket. Then he relaxed as much as possible and began casting his eyes about the reaches of blue water below, and the endless expanse of blue sky overhead.

He saw nothing but the brilliance of the golden sun above him, and its shimmering reflection on the water below. There was not a single sign of anything else, and before he realized it he was thinking bitter thoughts about Commander Buckley, and his confounded Defense Operation Sixteen.

It was fine, an efficient and effective operation order so long as props kept ticking over. On a single three- or four-hour patrol the planes of Forty-nine could cover an area of thousands of square miles in size. And if enemy craft of any description were sighted, a word or two over the radio could bring a powerful attacking force to that point in a short time. Sure, an efficient and effective plan of defense operation *if* props kept turning over.

That was just the point. The area to be patrolled was so huge that at no time was any plane in sight of another plane. And so, when one went down it went down alone, and nobody knew about it until all planes had returned to base. The "no radio" order fixed that.

"Bad business!" Barker growled. "The patrol courses should overlap at some point, just to check on ships in the air. A fellow could crack up and sink before the others even knew his ship was missing."

"Well, don't!" Cheviski suddenly boomed in his ear. "Just skip that part, will you? There's more than just water down there. Barracuda and things that don't like me at all. Funny about that engine, ain't it? Got any idea, Admiral?"

"It just got tired," Barker snapped. Then clenching one fist, "But when I get back and get my hands on those mechanics . . . Well, sit tight. Mike. I'll try and make this a nice one."

"Never mind trying!" Cheviski

howled. "Just be sure and *do* it!"

A minute or so later the Dauntless was in the water and down slightly by the nose. It had been a beautiful landing, but that small success didn't help Barker's spirits any. He wiggled out of his parachute harness, made sure the crash buoy would bob free if the plane should sink, then shoved open his glass hatch, and unsnapped his goggles.

"You bring a deck of cards, by any chance, Mike?" he asked. "We might be here for a spell."

Cheviski laughed harshly and made a face.

"You cheer a guy up so!" he grated. "No. And I didn't bring along any rubber boat, either. Think there's a chance of them finding us? Or a ship, maybe? I get seasick awful easy."

"Don't fall apart," Barker grunted. "There's lots of time. A good two hours anyway before the others get back to base and don't find us there. Another hour for them to get out here. Say four hours to cover everything. Four hours sitting here isn't going to kill us. And a surface ship might come along."

"Who's falling apart?" Cheviski snarled. "I was only asking a question. You don't have to go babying me. I'm just thinking the things you're thinking—only out loud. And I mean about the four other ships that sat down some place. That engine went awful sudden-like, Admiral, you know."

BARKER nodded somberly and absently fingered the throttle. He was thinking of sabotage, himself, yet at the same time trying not to. How anybody could have possibly tampered with the ship was beyond him. His mechanics were as loyal to the Navy as he was himself.

Also, it was a hard and fast rule with both Cheviski and himself to give their plane a thorough check before taking to the air. They had done it again this time, and there hadn't been so much as a hint of anything going wacky. And yet, the power plant had passed out as though it had been smacked with an axe—and with all the instruments indicating that everything was in order!

He combed his brain for an idea of what might go wrong with an engine, and not show up on the instruments. The only thing he could think of was something going haywire with the carburetor. But the engine passing out so quickly would prevent the direct cause from being known until an inspection was made.

True, the temperature and pressure needles had shifted position on their respective dials, but that was only natural because the engine had stopped. But the gas gauges had been okay, the oil, too, and the feed pressure where it should be. So, it must have been something tricky that—

Barker killed the thought cold as Cheviski's beefy fist came crashing down on his shoulder, and the foghorn voice boomed in his ears.

"Good tripe, will you look, Admiral! Off to port, there! We're getting company, and I don't feel so good. Lookit the size of that thing!"

A lump of ice took the place of Barker's heart as he snapped his head around to the left. Not sixty yards away was a stretch of frothy water, and in the middle of it a submarine was surfacing. It was a submarine right enough, but it looked almost as big as a cruiser as it pushed up out of the blue water until the conning tower, bridge, and fore and aft decks were awash. The conning tower hatch opened up and the head and shoulders of a man appeared.

HHEY!" came Cheviski's hoarse whisper. "It wouldn't be one of ours, would it?"

"Not that big," Barker heard his

own voice reply. "No. She's not one of our pig-boats. She's German, that's what she is!"

"This would happen to me!" Cheviski groaned. Then savagely, "Look! I can swivel my guns around. Do you think I should—"

"Don't be a plain fool!" Barker rapped, not taking his eyes off the U-boat that was mushing in closer to the downed plane. "You'd only get us a couple of shells that would settle everything. We've got to take this!"

"But that don't mean I have to like it!" Cheviski growled. "Ain't it fine? I see my first enemy, and that's all I can do about it!"

"And see that you don't do anything else!" Barker clipped, and stood up in the seat.

The U-boat was close alongside, now. Only a few yards of open water separated the wing-tip and the glistening sleek hull of the underwater rattlesnake. A couple of other figures popped up through the opening conning tower hatch, and went scrambling down the bridge ladder and along the deck.

They grabbed hold of the Dauntless and held her off. The flat-faced man who remained head and shoulders above the conning tower rim smiled at Barker and Cheviski and motioned with one hand.

"Climb out and come aboard!" he called in heavily-accented English. "Step lively, please."

"Don't bother about us!" Cheviski boomed out. "We're doing all right. You just run along, and—"

Something made sound and flame in

[Turn page]

NO FINER DRINK...



the German's hand, and something that sounded decidedly unpleasant whined, passed over the heads of the two Navy aviators.

"He means it!" Barker snarled. "You keep that big hatch of yours battened down, will you?"

As Barker prepared to climb out onto the wing he reached down into the pit, slipped the specially-made weights over the radio code book, and quickly tossed the whole business over the side. It sank out of sight instantly, and there was a howl of rage from the U-boat.

"I should kill you for that, you swine!" the German roared. "I should leave you to sink and be food for the barracudas!"

Barker looked at him, cold and flint-eyed.

"Did you think I would make you a present of it?" he clipped.

"Close your mouth, and come aboard!" the Nazi rasped. "One more bit of foolishness, and you *will* be very sorry!"

CHAPTER III

Nazi Magic

FACES blank of expression, but with dull aches in their hearts the two Americans crawled out on the wing, caught hold of hands reached out to them, and stepped aboard the U-boat. No sooner had their feet touched the water-washed steel than a couple of German sailors stuck Lugers in their ribs, and frisked them for side arms. They found none, and said so to the commander, standing in the conning tower opening.

The senior officer looked unhappy, then rasped out words in his native tongue that were too fast for Barker to follow, and were ten thousand feet over Cheviski's head. The action that followed was a good enough translation, though.

One of the sailors herded them aft and up the conning tower bridge ladder. There they were halted while the commander, looking thoroughly un-Nazi in grease-smeared, torn uniform,

and with unshaven face, inspected them both with close-set piggish eyes. Presently he grunted and popped down out of sight as though a trap-door had been sprung under his feet.

The sailor jabbed Barker and Cheviski with his Luger and pointed up the short ladder to the lip of the conning tower hatch. Both got the idea at once and climbed up, then down the vertical ladder into the bowels of the U-boat.

The stench of burned fuel oil, and the acrid smell of spilled battery acid, hit them like a wet blanket to clog their throats, and make their eyes smart. In the brief period of time allowed, Barker glanced about the control room of the U-boat into which they had descended, and his reaction was instantly one of amazement and reluctant admiration.

Familiar with the close quarters aboard most American submarines, where the crew members practically have to turn sideward to pass, to step into the interior of this U-boat was like stepping into the engine room of a battleship. She was positively ball-room size inside her hull, and Barker shivered slightly in spite of himself when he thought of the terrific amount of death and destruction she could pack aboard.

He was allowed only a sweeping glance around, however. Fingers closed on his arm almost instantly and he was led through a steel compartment door, and along a grated companionway. Halfway along he was halted, swung right, and none too gently shoved into a cabin.

The U-boat's commander sat behind a bolted-to-the-deck desk that faced the door. He had taken off his battered cap, revealing that not a single hair was on his egg-shaped head. Not even any fringe over the ears or at the nape of the neck. In a movie he would look as funny as they come. In his U-boat he didn't look funny at all. He looked cruel, sinister, and deadly.

He waved Barker and Cheviski to places on the steel drop-bench fastened to the wall, and grunted at the two escorting sailors. That obviously meant for them to scam, for they left in a hurry, swinging the steel door softly shut behind them.

The commander smiled at the two Americans, seemed about to speak, but bent over an inter-compartment phone instead. He rapped out something at top speed. Barker caught only two words of what was said, but those two set his brain to spinning over in wonder. They were, "dis-mantle" and "stow". Then the commander snapped off the connection and gave them his piggish-eyed attention again.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "you may now start regretting the folly of your stupid Government for making war on *der Fuehrer!*"

A LONG MOMENT of silence followed the German's words. He goggled at the Americans triumphantly, as though he half expected to see them both drop to their knees, pleading. They did nothing but return his look. Then Mike Cheviski unbattened his hatch a little as he shifted his big frame on the hard steel bench.

"*Der Fuehrer?*" he echoed. "You mean that bow-legged little slob who cracks the whip over you guys? Listen! When are you dopes ever going to get wise? That *Fuehrer* of yours is just a—"

Cheviski clapped his mouth shut quick, for the Luger had popped into the U-boat commander's hand again, and it was pointed straight at the third button down on Cheviski's flying jacket.

"You will be taught manners later," the German said in a harsh, blood-chilling voice. "For the present you will speak only when I tell you to. So, silence from you, swine!"

"Okay, okay," Cheviski mumbled. "Put the cannon away!"

The German left the "cannon" right where it was and focused his eyes on Barker.

"You could have made things easier, Lieutenant," he said softly, "had you not tossed what you did over the side. Small loss, however. I already have a copy of your radio code. I do not believe that it has been changed in so short a time."

Barker started slightly, and the German looked at him, bright-eyed, and smiled.

"You are surprised, Lieutenant?" he murmured. "You think this is a chance meeting, eh? But, no. Let me assure you that I have been waiting for you. And—"

"As you waited for the other four?" Barker blurted, hardly conscious that he had spoken. "Then our engine was—"

Barker didn't finish. He stumbled to a stop and stared incredulously at the German's smiling lips and his nodding head.

"You see?" the Nazi presently echoed, with a gesture. "You see what fools you Americans are to war upon the Reich? You are no match for us. No race in the world is the equal of Germans."

Barker felt something snap in his brain. He knew he was a fool, but thoughts of the *Reuben James*, and the *Kearny*, and a few other Navy ships crowded his head. He remembered a lifeboat he had sighted just two days before Pearl Harbor. The five men, two women, and the child, had all been dead. Eighteen days without food or water under a burning sun had been too much for them.

"How about the rodent race?" he bit off, tight-lipped.

The German blinked and pin-points of fire showed in his eyes. Then he chuckled softly, shrugged, got up from his chair and moved slowly around the desk.

"Your dog companion, Lieutenant," he murmured, "I would expect such words from his mouth. But from you, it is a different matter. So!"

The last was little more than a hiss, and the German's hand came out so fast that Barker didn't even have time to think about ducking. The barrel of the Luger caught him a stinging swipe on the left side of his face, and he went spilling head over heels off the iron bench.

"That is your first lesson!" the German snarled. "Before I have finished with you, you will have received many more!"

Flat on his back on the deck, and with bells ringing in his head, Barker stared stony-eyed up at the man. Then he heard Cheviski's booming voice, and saw the big fellow of Polish-born parents go into action.

"Hey! You can't do that to my pal! Not with me around, you can't!"

THE big fellow's arm was like a snapping bull-whip, or maybe a curved bit of lightning. The fist on the end of it smacked the German on the ear and almost tore his head off. The startled U-boat commander did a complete cartwheel clear of the deck, then crashed up against the compartment wall.

The Luger made a clanking sound as it hit the steel, and it went flying from his hand. It dropped four feet from Barker, and his spinning brain screamed for him to lunge for it. Perhaps he started to. He never knew for sure. For in the same split second the compartment door whanged open and the place was filled with armed German sailors.

Barker saw Cheviski swinging with both fists, knew in a hazy sort of way that he himself had regained his feet and was swinging at Nazi faces. Then the U-boat seemed to do an outside loop or something, and fall down on the top of his head. There was a loud noise in his brain, a great sheet of white light, and then there was neither sound nor light. There was just nothing. . . .

When Barker again opened his eyes his first thought was that he was in jail. He was sitting on a steel bench in a room that had a steel floor, ceiling, and walls. And a steel door. Also, there were steel bracelets about his wrists and ankles. They were fastened to chains which in turn were fastened to rings in the steel wall.

On the opposite side of the room, that was barely lighted by a small caged blue electric light bulb in the ceiling, was Mike Cheviski. The ex-football star was also handcuffed and chained. He had lumps and cuts all over his face, and one eye was closed and surrounded by a beautiful purple sunset. But as he saw Barker look at him the good eye lighted up, and the bruised lips parted in a grin.

"Hi, Admiral!" he said. "We kind of lost the ball on downs, I guess. There was too many, and too tough. How you feel?"

"I don't know, yet," Barker muttered, and strived to recall memory.

"What happened, and where are we?"

Cheviski's good eye popped wide.

"You don't remember?" he echoed.

"They must have slugged you hard, the bums! Don't you remember? We had a forced landing, and a U-boat surfaced and took us aboard. We made wise-cracks to the commander, and he didn't like it. He did something about it. The whole gol-darned German Navy fell on us.

"When they got worn out smacking us they threw us in here. Couple of hours ago, I guess. But, there's three, four of them lugs that ain't feeling so good either right now, I bet you. You darn near slugged one guy right through the hull. I bet he don't know his own name for a week. Can you pop 'em, Admiral!"

CHAPTER IV

Taken for a U-boat Ride

MEMORY was coming back to Barker in a rush. He made no comment. He hurt all over, inside and out. He checked over everything up to the time the lights went out. Then he groaned, and sighed.

"I guess we both talked too much, Mike," he grunted. "A prisoner should keep his trap shut. You say, two hours? We been underway that long? We're moving now, and below surface, too."

"Two hours, maybe lots longer—I don't know," Cheviski said. "Things have been kind of hazy. When the brain began clicking we were underway, and below. What do you figure comes next? Kind of screwy, isn't it?"

"It's at least not funny," Barker grunted. "But what do you mean by that?"

"You and me," Cheviski said with a faint puzzled frown. "I always heard that the Nazis never went out of their way to save a guy's life. And we gave them a little trouble to boot, too. What they keeping us on ice for? Why ain't we at the bottom wrapped up in an anchor chain? Like a cock-eyed dream, ain't it, huh?"

"Maybe you've got something there, Mike," Barker murmured, and frowned a little, too. "Perhaps his nibs thinks he can use us."

"How?" Cheviski wanted to know. "I don't know a thing about running one of these things. And no Kraut slob is going to teach me, either. But, hey! Maybe that's an idea."

"What's an idea?"

"We could make like we'd seen lots of sea duty on our pig-boats," Cheviski said eagerly. "And get them to put us to work. Then maybe we might get the chance to open a valve, or something, and send this thing to the bottom, and—"

"And us along with it!" Barker cut in.

Cheviski's lips shut tight and his face went unhappy.

"Yeah, that's right," he sighed. "I guess that wouldn't be such a hot idea, would it?"

"No, it wouldn't," Barker said flatly. "But look, Mike. No wise stuff, or funny stuff, from here on. Let's not be dopes again. We've got to play this one close. It's big, Mike. I've got a hunch it's plenty big. Did you hear him say he already had a copy of our radio code book? And he just about admitted that he knew all about the four other planes we lost. And that our engine was fixed, and he was waiting for us. We're the next suckers on the list, Mike. We've got to play it close, and do something about it."

Cheviski gulped, swallowed hard, and looked uncomfortable.

"Yeah, he did say those things, didn't he?" he finally got out. "And that engine certainly pooped out like no other engine I ever heard. So they got a rat back at the Chagres Station, huh? Would I love to get my lunch hooks on him! Wonder who he could be?"

"What's it to us, now?" Barker said gloomily. "I'm wondering more what he could do to an engine that we couldn't spot on our check? But he certainly knew Operation Sixteen inside and out. It's three strikes on us for not sighting this thing from the air. I'm glad Buckley isn't here. He'd have a word or two to say about that fumble."

"Who says it was a fumble?" Cheviski growled. "Ten to one this tub's commander knew the time our engine was going to poop. And he stayed deep until we were in the water, or just about in. And even Admiral King wouldn't spot anything deep down with the way that sun was doing things with the water."

"Don't go taking it hard, Admiral. It wasn't our fault for not seeing things. But I'd sure like to know what's coming next. I'm getting plenty tired sitting here on this steel. And don't try to get these things off. I did, and they don't come. Gosh! Handcuffed and chained inside a sub! Now ain't that a sweet set-up!"

BARKER just nodded and let it go at that. His aches and pains were beginning to step it up, and his brain was a swirling torment. It wasn't that fear was gnawing at him around the edges that rasped his nerves. It was more the cockeyed, mysterious situation in which he found himself.

True, Uncle Sam was in the war, and no man living can name a single thing that can't happen in war. But, up to now, things had happened to other people at other places. That war had actually come this close to the Canal Zone, and had reached out to tap Mike and himself on the shoulder was still a little difficult to believe.

Perhaps it was because it had all happened so suddenly. But, suddenly or slowly, it *had* happened, and. . . And as Mike had said, "What comes next?"

As though the gods listening in decided to answer that question at once there came the click of the door lock and the door swung open. Framed in the opening was the undersea craft's commander.

For a fleeting instant Barker felt joy in his heart. The Nazi had quite a lump on the left side of his face, and the left eye was considerably more puffed than the right. But savage hatred glittered in both eyes, and the crooked smile on the lips held all the mirth of an exploding bomb.

"So you do not feel so smart, now, eh?" the Nazi jeered and came inside.

"A little lesson and your tongue doesn't wish to wag so, no? You Americans are fools! You have no brains. You never realize you are defeated until it is too late. When you are dead. It is so stupid."

The man paused as though challenging either of them to speak. They said nothing. They just stared and waited. The Nazi beamed and nodded.

"Good!" he grunted. "You learn quickly, at least. I come to tell you that we make port very soon. You will be taken ashore and put to work. Hard work. But it is what you deserve. I have things to do, or I would explain all this to you later. So I do it now. If you wish to live you will do as you are told. If you wish to die, your wish will be granted—but not in a pleasant way. Remember that I have made it clear to you. And you, Lieutenant—"

The man paused long enough to focus his small piggish eyes on Barker.

"And you, Lieutenant," he repeated, "have it within your power to make things easy for this dog, here, and others you are to meet. You will be able to save them a lot. Even their lives, no doubt. Keep that in mind when I speak to you again. That is all."

With a curt nod the U-boat's commander wheeled around and went out the door, crashing it shut behind him. Barker stared blankly at the closed door, then at Cheviski.

"You heard that?" he asked and frowned.

"Yeah, I heard it," Mike Cheviski grunted, with a shrug. "He says we got to remember things! Maybe he's gone slug nutty."

For perhaps an hour or more the two Americans sat silently in their steel-walled prison, each busy with his own thoughts, and not getting any place at all. Thinking simply added to the torment in their heads, and thickened the shroud of baffling mystery that hung over the past, the present, and particularly the future.

A THOUSAND times over Barker took the Nazi's words apart and examined them closely. And each time he reached the same conclusion

—one that seemed a downright impossibility. In short, that Mike and he were being taken to some place where the pilots and gunner-observers of the four other Forty-nine planes were held captives at hard labor.

That seemed to be it—but impossible. However, the crazy twist was the U-boat commander's crack about him, Barker, having the power to make it easier. And to remember that when the time came.

"Sweet tripe, I give up!" he suddenly grated aloud.

"I did that hours ago!" Cheviski muttered. "I . . . Hey! We're going up. I can feel her. We must be making that port he was telling us about. But where in thunder could this thing go in the time it's had?"

Barker didn't answer. He didn't have time to answer. The door was opened again, and two armed sailors came inside. There was a surly anger in their eyes, too, and a strip or two of surgeons' tape stuck on their flat moon-shaped faces instantly explained why they bore no affection for the two Americans. Barker looked at them calm-eyed, but Cheviski grinned from ear to ear.

"You guys been in a little trouble, huh?" he taunted.

They glowered, but said nothing. While one stood back where he could use his Luger on either of them, the other unfastened the chains from the wall rings, but made no move to take off wrist and ankle bracelets. Cheviski scowled, held out his wrists, and opened his mouth, but Barker beat him to it.

"Pipe down!" he snapped. "Don't start anything here. Keep it shut!"

"Yeah, okay," Cheviski grumbled, and lowered his hands.

The sailor with the gun stepped to one side and jerked his head at the open door. The other guard, who held the chain ends as though driving a pair of horses, shook the chains savagely and delivered two swift kicks where they would get instant results.

Choking back the red anger that surged up in him, Barker flashed Cheviski a warning glance, moved forward to the door, and through it into the companionway.

As he walked back toward midships

he felt the U-boat come to a quivering stop. Orders were shouted hoarsely, and a few seconds later a gust of fresh air came sweeping down the opened conning tower hatch to push back the stench of the U-boat's in-nards. A moment later more orders were shouted, and there was the harsh grind of gears, the whine of an electric-driven deck crane, and a hundred and one other metallic sounds.

The sailors halted Barker and Cheviski just short of the control-room ladder reaching up into the conning tower. They stood there while the U-boat's commander, shaved, shined, and spick and span in tropical whites, went monkey style up the ladder with a couple of his junior officers at his heels.

When the last pair of booted feet disappeared Barker and Cheviski got kicked again, and were started up the ladder.

CHAPTER V

Death Haven

NO SOONER had Barker's head and shoulders lifted above the conning tower rim, than he took a sweeping look about him. And no sooner did he take the sweeping look than he almost lost his hold in dumb-founded amazement.

The huge U-boat was made fast to a pier that extended out into a small lake completely surrounded by tropical growth. Not only surrounded but reaching out overhead so that not more than pencil-thick beams of light were able to sift down through entwined green masses of foliage.

But his first surprise was no more than a mild shock compared to the jolt he got when he glanced forward. It was really two jolts. The first was the sight of a sister U-boat tied up at the same pier. And the second was from what he saw down through the slowly opening bow hatch covers of the U-boat on which he stood.

Down in the craft was the dis-mantled Dauntless that he had flown out from Chagres Station! Wings,

tail section, fuselage, and engine, were all separate and neatly packed together down in the hold. And even as he stared, unbelieving, the block and tackle from the deck crane was slowly lowered down through the hatch opening.

"They salvaged the ship!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Took her right up out of the water. I—I can't believe it!"

"Me neither!" came Cheviski's equally hoarse whisper in his ear. "Gosh! These Nazis know lots of tricks, don't they. They . . . Omigosh! Look! Ashore! The guys from Forty-nine! There's Duffy, and Clinton, and Allen. Hey I got to slug somebody. I just got to!"

A red film was pouring into Barker's brain as he stared shoreward. But he still had sense enough left to jab an elbow warningly into Cheviski's belly.

Ashore were six figures in little or no clothing. Their faces were blackened by stubble beards, and their bare backs were crossed and recrossed by long red welts from a lash. Their arms were free, but there were irons about their ankles with a connecting chain just long enough to allow for a little short of an ordinary step.

Two giant Germans, each armed with a wicked bull-whip and a holstered Luger, were watching over them while they hoisted up long flat-hewn logs on their shoulders and went staggering up a path cut through the heavy tropical growth. Despite the stubble beards, and the pain and fatigue drawn faces, Barker instantly recognized six of the missing eight members of Forty-nine.

"Yes, they are your comrades, Lieutenant. They do not look very happy, do they?"

Barker dragged his eyes from the rage-inflaming sight to look down at the U-boat's commander on the bow deck.

"You rat!" he rasped, and gripped the bridge railing until his knuckles showed white. "Come up here and I'll kill you with my two hands!"

The German leered and shook his head sadly.

"So that little lesson did not help, eh?" he murmured. "Too bad. Well,

after you have spent a night with your friends, you may change your mind. I will see you in the morning, Lieutenant, perhaps!"

Blind rage engulfed Barker and he started to lunge forward. But all he succeeded in doing was to crash flat on his face as the sailor jerked viciously on his chains.

Stunned and pretty much winded he was not able to follow just what happened in the next few minutes. He realized in a confused sort of way that Cheviski and he were herded off the U-boat, and marched up the pier and onto spongy ground. The sweet, stifling smell of the tropics filled his nostrils, and he knew that three or four times he stumbled to his knees, and was quickly booted up onto his feet again.

HE HEARD Cheviski's steady cursing at his elbow, but it was just a meaningless sound in his ears. Then finally he was shoved from behind and sent pitching forward on his face. He got a kick in the ribs that seemed to drive his heart right out past his back-bone. Then Cheviski was helping him up to a sitting position, and haggard, stubble-beard-covered faces were swimming around in front of his eyes.

"Easy does it, Admiral!" Cheviski was soothing in his ear. "You kind of forgot we were supposed to keep it mum. Here, have a cigarette, and . . . Why those dirty crooks! They took both packs I had on me. Hey! Any you guys got a butt for him?"

"Never mind, Mike," Barker heard himself say. "I'm okay."

Then he was looking at the six missing members of Forty-nine. He clamped down hard on his aches and pains, and shook the fog from his brain.

"Hello fellows," he said, and forced a grin. "Where's Dickey and Stafford?"

Silence greeted the question for a moment, then a red-headed ensign named Allen licked his cracked lips and spoke.

"They're dead!" he said harshly. "Refused to work, and tried to slug the guards. They got shot down like dogs. That was four days ago—or

maybe it was four years. You lose track of time here."

"Did the same thing happen to all you fellows?" Barker asked, as he swept them with his eyes. "I mean, the engine went, and you sat down, and a U-boat took you aboard, and the plane, too?"

"Just that," Allen said, with a weary nod. Then pointing over toward Barker's left. "There they are, all four of them. Yours will be there by morning."

Barker twisted around and stared in the direction of the pointing finger. Not a hundred yards away and lined up prop to rudder were four Douglas Dauntless scout-bombers. The section and pilot markings had been removed, painted over with battle gray, but apart from that nothing else had been changed.

The planes were resting on a fifty-foot-wide runway made of flat hewn logs placed side by side and bolted together. From the lead plane the runway extended forward through a sort of cleared tropical tunnel for a distance of well over a quarter of a mile. By leaning forward and straining his eyes Barker could see that the opening at the far end now was turned a blood-red by the rays of a dying sun.

"We made that runway, all of it!" he heard Allen's tired but bitter voice drone in his ears. "You work, or else." He cursed bitterly. "If I could only just get one crack at them before I fold up for keeps! Hoping for that chance is all that keeps us going. But each day the chance gets less and less."

Cheviski muttered something deep in his throat, but Barker didn't pay attention. He was still staring at the parked planes, and at his immediate surroundings.

A thatched roof covered the spot where he and the others sat hunched on the ground, and the chains of each man were fastened to iron ring-rods driven deep in the ground. In the distance he could hear voices speaking in German, but he could not see the speakers. Or anything else, for that matter, because all was blotted out by thick growth. It was like being under a gigantic tropical growth

tent with the air so close and heavy you had to breathe it in chunks.

Suddenly he realized that he had ripped off his tunic and other bits of his clothing, and that they were wound about the chains connecting his ankles. He stared at what he had done, then started ripping the seams to get the clothing free of the chains. When he had finished he was wearing only shorts, shoes, and socks. And he still felt as though he was smothering in a dozen woollen blankets.

WHY?" he suddenly asked of nobody in particular. "Anybody know what their game is, and where this place is? And those two U-boats! That's a lake where they are!"

A thin, hawk-faced lieutenant named Clinton laughed mirthlessly.

"Sure, we know *all* the answers!" he said bitterly. "And so will you, before you've been here a day. That's the best part of their fun, curse them! Telling us all about it. They're not worrying. They know they have us cold. They know, as we know, that we're going to die here. Yeah! While *they* blast the Colon end of the Canal higher than a kite, and block it so it'll take months, and maybe years to clear. Oh, they've got it all worked out sweet. And curse their black souls, they can get away with it, too!"

"Block the Canal?" Cheviski echoed in amazement. "They must be kidding you. They couldn't get U-boats within twenty miles of the Canal. We'd blow 'em right out of the water."

"Think so?" Clinton said, turning on him savagely. "Well, I don't, see? I know what they're going to pull. They've boasted about it enough to all of us. You blasted fool! That rat, Ensign Miller, was here just yesterday. I thought I'd go mad when I saw him. And to think I once bunked at Pensacola with that dirty rodent!"

Barker had to try twice before he could get the words out.

"Miller?" he cried. "Of Section Two? But he just got back from sick leave this morning. You say he was here? That he—"

"Is why we're all here!" Allen cut

in harshly. "Miller is a Nazi agent. He admitted it to us yesterday. What's more, he said that you'd be with us soon. Both of you. He's the one that fixed our engines—but good. He told us how. It was simple. I read about it once in a magazine somewhere.

"He makes a little bag out of cheese cloth soaked in paraffin, fills it with water, seals it, and drops it into the gas tank. In about two hours, the raw gas eats away the paraffin and the water gets into the gas. When the engine sucks it into the carbureter float chamber your engine is all done!"

Cheviski boomed a curse and bunched his big fists.

"I remember, now, Admiral, seeing that guy walking away when we went to our ship this morning! Him, huh? Well, I never liked his looks much, or him either! The yellow Nazi bum!"

"He's the baby!" Clinton grated. "He was here yesterday. Came in on one of those U-boats. Been one of Hitler's boot-lickers for years, only he didn't put it that way. And know something else? They've had this set-up here for U-boats ever since the war started!

"There are no Nazi U-boat bases on this side of the Atlantic, huh? Nuts! Lindbergh and Senator Wheeler should have a look, is all I've got to say!"

"But the Canal!" Barker persisted. "How are they going to work it? And where is this place, anyway?"

"This is a cay about a hundred and fifty miles off Costa Rica, as near as I can figure out," Allen spoke up. "And about two hundred from the Canal. There's an underground entrance so that the U-boats can come up in that little lake. Whether its natural, or whether they cut it, I don't know.

"Anyway, they've got everything here from machine-gun bullets to aerial torpedoes. A perfect hideout way off the beaten track. I haven't heard the engine of a single patrol plane since I've been here, and that's two weeks.

"See those planes? They're fitting torpedo racks to them. Two, mind you, for each plane! When their

Zero Day arrives—and it must be soon—they're going to put markings on them of ships *still* in Forty-nine. Miller will give them that dope. Then they'll be taken off by *Luft-waffe* rats, who arrived only three days ago, and flown out to a rendezvous with the U-boats just off the entrance to the Canal. And—"

BARKER could not believe it possible.

"But— he cried, but went no farther as Allen silenced him with an angry gesture.

"Sure, but you're wrong," the red-head said. "Shore spotters will see a formation of five ships *from Forty-nine with known markings!* They'll figure it a formation returning from patrol.

"Meanwhile far underneath the water the two big U-boats are sneaking past the mine barriers. Then when all is set the U-boats let fly at our naval ships at the entrance to the Canal, and the planes pop down and let loose on the Gatun Dam and Locks.

"With what they'll be dropping they'll fix it so's a rowboat couldn't get through. They'll have the jump, see? They'll be taken for Forty-nine planes. And they'll be flying right over the submerged U-boats as a perfect cover protection for them. Once past the mine barriers those big U-boats will be able to tear all creation apart."

"But they'll get theirs!" Cheviski grated viciously. "And the planes too. They won't live to tell Hitler about it!"

"So what?" Allen snapped. "Our fleet units are stuck in two oceans, and will have to take the long way around. Don't worry! These Nazis know it's curtains for them. But that doesn't bother them a bit. They've been taught it's tops to die for their rotten *Fuehrer*, you know!"

Barker started to speak, but quickly snapped his lips shut. The sound of an aircraft engine came clearly to them all from somewhere up off to the right.

Every man froze stiff, held his breath, and cocked an ear to the roar that grew louder and louder.

CHAPTER VI

Satan's Choice

IT WAS Allen who finally broke the heavy silence that settled over the group. He expelled clamped air from his lungs in a rush of sound, and struggled up onto his feet. His face was dead-white under the stubble and dirt, and Barker's heart tightened in bitter anger as he saw the bleeding sores made by Allen's ankle shackles.

"That's a Wright engine!" Allen announced in a trembling voice. "And . . . listen! He's cut his gun! Sounds like he's going down for that inlet on the far side of this cay. Curse this roof! If we could only get a look at him, and signal, or something. But why's he going down to land? Or is he?"

Nobody said a word. Every head was thrown back, and all eyes were staring hard up at the thatched roof in the hope of catching a glimpse of the plane as it slid by overhead. Three of them did catch a split-second glimpse of wings and fuselage. And it was Barker who spoke first. His voice was tight and strained.

"A Vought-Sikorsky utility job!" he said. "And I think I saw the three-stripe marking of Forty-nine. He's landing, though. Hasn't goosed his engine once. He must be on the inlet, now, so—"

Barker didn't finish. He looked at the others, and they nodded gravely.

"So it isn't a friend!" Clinton spat out. "That leaves just one guess. Ensign Miller! Something's popped, is my bet. He took a Vought-Sikorsky up for a joy-hop and buzzed out here to report to his two bosses. And I'm the guy who used to give the bird to those pulp magazine thrillers! I wonder what's happened?"

"Maybe they've decided to pull the trigger," Allen said, and jerked his head toward the four Dauntless planes. "Those ships are set to go right now. All you have to do is jab the starter button, and take off the wheel brakes. The runway's about

long enough. Good pilots could make it easy. It wouldn't take them half an hour to put the torpedoes in the racks. If—"

The redhead choked and clenched his fists in a helpless gesture.

"That stack of TNT mine cartridges down by the pier!" he said a moment later, in a husky voice. "If I could only get hold of one of them! Just one is all I'd want!"

The man broke a little, sank to the ground, and began slowly to pound his two fists on his knees. Clinton reached out as far as his chains would allow and patted the redhead on the shoulder.

"Just hang on hard, Allen," he said evenly. "The rats can't ride this high forever. Somebody's going to spill them for a fall, some day. It isn't in the cards for them to grab off the whole pot."

Allen shrugged and stopped beating his knees. Nobody said anything. Barker looked at Cheviski and was startled slightly by the look on the big fellow's face.

The gunner-observer's chin stuck out like a chunk of marble. His muscles were bunched as though he were about to pounce on somebody. And there was a wild, mad look in his eyes that were fixed steadfastly on Allen. His lips were parted as though he were about to speak, but no sound came from between them.

A moment later the huge hulk of one of the guards loomed up in the fading light. He gave them all a sneer, slapped his coiled bull-whip against his leg, and suggestively fingered his holstered Luger. A second guard appeared in back of him, stepped past and bent over Barker's ankle shackles. With a key he unlocked one and freed the chain from the ring-rod in the ground, then snapped the shackle back on again.

"Get up!" he snarled, and hit Barker on the side of the head. "You are wanted."

CHEVISKI growled deep in his throat, but Barker shot him a warning look. He got up and suffered one of the guards to curl steel fingers about his arm and jerk him into motion.

They led him along a cut-out path that led toward the small lake where the U-boats were berthed. But a hundred yards this side of them they wheeled him right and into a small clearing that contained the only sign of civilization. It was a small hut that had a door and windows that were covered by fine netting to keep out the night insects.

The guard pulled the door netting aside and gave Barker a vicious shove in the back. He tried to keep his balance but didn't even come close. He tripped and went sprawling on his face on a hard wood floor.

For a moment he stayed right where he was. Then as a booted foot prodded him none too gently in the ribs he struggled up onto his feet, eyes blazing, brain whirling, and ready to lash out at the first thing he saw.

The first thing he saw, however, was a short-barreled Luger pointed straight at him. It was held in the paw of the bald-headed U-boat commander who sat at a table that was completely covered by a huge marine chart of the approach and entrance of the Colon end of the Canal.

Beside him sat another German. He looked like a bloated frog in his tropical whites. So puffy was his face that the eyes were just slits in the skin. He was obviously the commander of the other U-boat, but Barker didn't give him more than a passing glance. What caught and held his attention was the third figure in the room.

The man stood a few feet in back of the two Germans, and he was turned slightly sideward as though ready to dive out the rear window at an instant's notice. He was short, and not bad-looking, save for the eyes that were close-set and too small for the rest of his face. They were restless eyes, rather fearful and shifty. They dropped instantly before Barker's burning glare and became fixed on the marine chart on the desk.

Barker swallowed hard, and came up a bit on his toes.

"Take off that Navy uniform, Miller, you rat!" he rasped. "Take it off, or I'll rip it off, you dirty traitor!"

"And die at once for your foolishness, Lieutenant!" the bald-headed

U-boat commander snarled, "The advantage is all ours. Don't be a fool. Will you stupid American swine never learn that in war it is not the method but *the goal*? Sit down, Lieutenant!"

Barker ignored the command. He kept his eyes riveted on a man who had shared Air Station life with him. Who had eaten in the same mess, smoked and binged in the same lounge, flown in the same section patrol, and done all of the hundred and one other things in Naval Aviation life.

Blood-red raging hatred, scorn, and contempt surged through him as he glared at Ensign Miller. Yet with it all he wondered if maybe he was just dreaming. Whether this was not all cockeyed, and not even a little bit so.

"Sit down, Lieutenant!" the U-boat commander's thundering roar blasted into his thoughts. "None of us is interested in what you think of him. The situation has changed, and I have decided to talk to you now instead of tomorrow. You have talked with your comrades, eh? They have told you a little of what is to be?"

BARKER took his eyes off Miller's face and focused them on the U-boat commander, as he sank into a chair.

"They told me about your pipe-dreams!" he bit off. "You don't stand a chance. Not even a little one. You'll be smoked out like the dirty rats you are."

"Are such words part of your Navy training, Lieutenant?" the German murmured with a sneer. "So useless, and so unnecessary. No, they are not pipe-dreams. But I did not call you here to discuss our plans. I called you here to offer you the chance of saving the lives of your seven other comrades. I pay them the compliment of saying they are brave men, Lieutenant. If I were you I would certainly consider their lives well worth the saving."

The German paused as though giving Barker a chance to speak. The Navy pilot said nothing. He simply stared unwinking at the bald-headed one. The German shrugged, leaned forward and placed a stubby finger on the marine chart.

"We have one little problem," he said presently. "These mine fields guarding the breakwater entrance to Limon Bay. I have discovered that they are changed rather often. I have also found out that you had a part in working out the mine field systems. You helped direct the laying operations from the air, I believe."

"You're crazy!" Barker snapped. "That comes under Coast and Harbor defense, and—"

"You're a liar, Barker!" Ensign Miller suddenly snarled. "It was done with Naval Aviation cooperation, so that there'd be areas where Navy planes could sit down without touching off something. You and that fat-head, Buckley, worked out the charts. You both rode herd on the job from the air not three weeks ago. You know where every barrier is stretched night and day."

The rat in U. S. Naval Aviation spoke the truth. Barker had been assigned the job along with Commander Buckley. He did know the intricate mine barrier system as he knew the palm of his hand, but he would take a bullet right between the eyes before he would even so much as hint where a single spiked ball of roaring doom was riding at the end of its anchor chain just under the surface of the placid blue water. He looked at the traitor and dragged down one corner of his mouth.

"Have you tried selling them the Brooklyn Bridge, too, rat?" he asked contemptuously. "I hear they're suckers for any kind of information."

Miller made whistling sounds through his clenched teeth, and his small eyes fairly spat out flames of anger. However, he did not take a single step forward.

"The information is true, Lieutenant!" the U-boat commander said coldly. "So you waste words with your breath. Listen to me! Tomorrow we render your beautiful Panama Canal utterly useless for a long, long time to come. Whether you tell me something I wish to know, or not, will not save your precious canal. It —is finished. But, your refusal to answer my question *will* make a difference regarding you, and your comrades."

"You're wasting breath, now, so skip it!" Barker said, tight-lipped, as the German paused. "I wouldn't tell you the time!"

THE U-boat commander smiled coldly and fondled the Luger he had drawn from his pocket.

"I believe I can change your mind," he said. "My question is this. What will be the arrangement of the mine barriers tomorrow morning? There is the chart, and here is a pencil. You can plot it for me. And bear in mind, Lieutenant! I have a way to first find out if you lie, or not. False information will be the same as no information at all."

"I said you're wasting your breath, didn't I?" Barker snapped. Then glancing at Miller, "Too bad you don't know, bum! It would get you an extra bonus, I guess."

"By noon tomorrow," the bald-headed U-boat commander said, "this place will be completely evacuated. It has served our purpose, and we are abandoning it. Let me assure you, Lieutenant, that it was well selected.



No ship comes within twenty miles of here. And no plane comes within signaling distance. Anybody left on this cay would be doomed to a most unpleasant death.

"Tell us what we want to know, and I promise that two collapsible rubber boats, and provisions, will be left for you and your friends to use to get out where you'll be picked up and saved. Refuse, or give us false information, and you will be left here with nothing. Not a bit of food, not one drop of drinking water.

"*Nothing*, Lieutenant. And your comrades will be told why. Not because you made the task impossible for us. The canal is doomed, whether you speak, or not. They will die because you refused to make it a little easier for us to accomplish our task.

"And so, Lieutenant—are their lives worth the satisfaction of delaying our triumph a mere hour, or possibly two at the most?"

CHAPTER VII

The Forty-niners

AS HE gave his ultimatum the German crashed his fist down on the table. He fixed his piggish eyes on the Navy pilot's face. Barker returned the look, and said nothing. But his brain was whirling over at lightning speed.

Left deserted with neither food nor water, Allen, and Clinton, and the others probably would last two days, if that long. Brave lives thrown away, and for what? Just as the German had put it! For the satisfaction of delaying their triumph an hour, or maybe two.

He knew what the German meant by that. It would take that much longer for the two giant U-boats to feel their way past the mine barriers. But supposing the U-boats didn't get past, struck a mine and were destroyed? So what? It didn't change much. If five Douglas Dauntless planes fitted with two torpedoes apiece reached Gatun Dam and the Gatun Locks, the canal could still be blocked off for nobody could tell how long.

Yet there was a chance that something might go wrong if the U-boats were destroyed. If he, Barker, said nothing, perhaps some kind of a miracle would rise up to smite down these rats of the Reich. Yet—yet, was it worth Allen, and Clinton, and Mike Cheviski, and the others? Did he have the right to snuff out their lives—for nothing?

The thoughts poured through his brain like liquid fire. He hardly realized it as he swayed forward slightly, his eyes fixed on the Luger in the U-boat commander's hand. The Luger being jerked back out of his reach, and the harsh laugh stopped him.

"Don't be a fool!" the German snarled. "I'll not shoot to kill you, and end your torment. No! Just to maim you a little, and—"

The man stopped short with his mouth hanging open. Anger blazed up in his eyes, then dumbfounded

amazement, and then a look of wild terror spread over his face.

"Gott!" he whispered hoarsely. "Gott! No! Don't!"

"Drop your cannons and reach!" the voice of Mike Cheviski boomed out behind Barker. "Reach, I'm telling you!"

For one long second Barker froze motionless, hardly daring to believe his ears. Then he half twisted around and looked at Cheviski who was standing just inside the hut door. He stood spraddle-legged, with both hands stretched above his head. But in his two hands he held a black metal cylinder about ten inches long and eight inches across.

Barker took one look at that cylinder and felt his face go pale, and his knees turn to rubber. He had seen such "cans" often, and instantly recognized this one for one of the TNT cartridges used to load mines as well as torpedoes.

In short, Cheviski was holding aloft enough explosives to blow the hut and its occupants clear across the Caribbean. And the big ex-football star was having the time of his life.

"Timed it just right, hey, Admiral?" he boomed. "Been outside listening to their song and dance. Get around in back of them, Admiral, and lift their side arms. This thing's getting heavy. I might drop it any minute, and—"

"Gott, don't!" the slit-eyed U-boat commander gasped in a strangled voice. "You would kill us all!"

"Yeah, I thought of that," Cheviski chuckled. Then fixing agate eyes on Miller, "You, huh? Fix our engine, hey? Why you crawling worm, for two cents I'd—"

"Cheviski, don't!" the traitor screamed. "You've got us—cold."

BARKER had slipped around behind the two U-boat commanders, and Miller, and had frisked them of their guns. He backed over to Cheviski's side.

"Rest your arms, Mike," he said. "Put the thing down. There's some rope over there. Tie them up good. But how in the name of—"

"Allen gave me the idea, saying where this stuff was down by the piers," Cheviski said out the corner of

his mouth. "I eased down after they took you away. I konked a Kraut that I bumped into and took one of these. I came over here and let them two big bums outside have a look.

"Did they drop their guns when they got that look! I made them lie down, then kicked their teeth in. I couldn't use my hands, you see. Anyway, they won't be bothering nobody. Tie 'em? I got it planned better than that, Admiral.

"The big slob of a guard on the right outside. He's got the key that unlocks those ankle bracelets you're wearing. Go get yourself free. Then we go over and let the boys loose. Then we take those crates and fly away. I'll drop this baby from the air. I can see the fireworks better from up there."

"You fools, you'll never leave here alive!" the bald-headed U-boat commander rasped hoarsely. "There are two hundred men on this cay. They'll shoot you down like dogs. You'll never escape!"

Cheviski didn't say anything. Still holding the can of TNT he stepped over closer to the U-boat commander then shot up one foot and kicked the German right in the belly.

"That ain't fair fighting, I know, Admiral," he said over his shoulder to Barker. "But I've been wanting to do that to some fat Kraut ever since Hitler marched into Poland. Okay, on your feet, slob! You three guys walk ahead of us. And if any of your pals come running tell 'em it's okay to shoot. When I drop, you go up, and I don't mean, perhaps.

"Go ahead, Admiral, go on. We took enough lumps from them, didn't we? Nuts! Don't be particular. These bums know only one way to fight. Well, we know that way, too. Let's go!"

Barker grinned in spite of himself. Here was a Mike Cheviski he had never seen before. Here was Mike Cheviski going into action his way when the chips were down. Navy or Army technique? Nuts! The big ex-football star of Polish parentage was fighting the Nazi way—without rules.

Barker was tempted to take Cheviski's tip and slug Miller and the slit-eyed U-boat commander just on

general principles, but something wouldn't let him do it. Perhaps it was because he had more Navy training in back of him than Cheviski had. Or perhaps it was because his parents hadn't come from Nazi-devastated Poland. Anyway, he grinned but shook his head, then motioned with one of his Lugers for the two Germans and the Navy traitor to walk out the door ahead of him.

Once out in the open air his blood ran a little cold, and his heart skipped a few beats. It was still quite a long way from dark, and the other Germans might see them herding their prisoners over to where Allen, Clinton, and the others were. A German with a rifle could pick them off like clay pigeons, and not realize what Cheviski now had tucked under his arm like a football.

A second later, though, he shrugged aside his fears and steeled himself. This was Cheviski's party, and he would play it the ex-football star's way. But, how in heaven's name had Cheviski got loose from his chains? It—

"That's the lug there, Admiral," Cheviski broke into his thoughts and pointed. "See? There's a bunch of keys hanging to his belt. Get 'em, and let's go. The boys will be getting impatient."

BARKER bent down to relieve the guard of the keys.

"How the devil did you get free?" he asked Cheviski.

"Simple," Cheviski grunted. "Tried to tell you but there wasn't the chance. Besides, you were kind of out cold. When they tossed us in with the boys they took off one shackle to pass it through the ring. I sort of dragged it from the lug's hand by stumbling. Then sort of ground it into the dirt. He slugged me, but it worked. Got the hollow end jammed with dirt."

"It didn't lock tight like he thought. I was able to yank it open a couple of notches. Enough to slip it off my foot. A guy once showed me how. He'd done time in a Georgia chain gang. Boy! Do I buy him drinks if I ever see him again! I . . . Steady, you bums!"

Cheviski leaped forward and kicked

Miller hard in the pants. The traitor sobbed in pain and terror.

"I wasn't trying to break, Mike!" he choked. "I just tripped!"

"Well, stop tripping, and walk!" Cheviski growled. "Believe me, punk, I'll get you first. Come on, the three of you. Move!"

It was perhaps a quarter of a mile to the prisoner compound but it seemed like ten miles to Barker. With every step he took he expected to hear a hoarse cry in German followed by the crack of a Luger or a rifle. But the Fates were kind or perhaps the gods stood in the way and made the light bad for the other Germans on the cay.

At any rate the strange party reached the other Yank prisoners without a single thing happening. Allen saw them first, and leaped to his feet, eyes blazing. He seemed to see only Miller and the two Germans. He started to hurl himself at them, completely forgetting that he was chained to the ground. Had not Clinton lunged out and grabbed him in time the redhead would have snapped every bone in his ankle.

"Steady, Allen!" Clinton panted and dragged him back. "Mike, I'll love you for life. You made it, big boy, you made it. Here! For crying out loud, give me the key! And you, Miller! When I'm loose I'm going to—"

"You make it steady!" Barker snapped, and stepped close. "We haven't got time to start slapping rats around. Mike's miracle won't last forever. I've got the key. As I release each man, leg for the planes. Mike and I will come last. When you hear me yell, start your engines and get going. And *keep going!*"

Barker's crisp voice of authority had instant effect. Blind rage caused by the appearance of the two Germans and Miller died down instantly. Each man realized there was more at stake than beating these three chunks of human vermin to pulp. And Mike Cheviski was the most relieved of them all.

"That's the stuff, Admiral!" he gulped. "Me, I'm no good at giving orders. You take over. I'll just make these guys stand between us and whoever might come looking."

CHAPTER VIII

Navy Torpedo

CCHEVISKI was still talking as Barker bent down and released Clinton. The man instantly whirled and started for the line of planes. Duffy was next and went chasing after Clinton. Then Wilson, then an observer named Harris, and a pilot named Baxter. Without a word they all streaked over toward the planes.

Barker bent down and released Allen's ankles and heard Cheviski curse softly, and slap a hand to his face. Then almost instantly there was a bellow of rage from the big fellow's lips. Barker jerked around just in time to see the two Germans, and Miller, go racing off down the cut path. At the same time he saw the can of TNT at Cheviski's feet where the big fellow had placed it while he slapped at a mess of tick-flies on his face.

At almost the same instant a low mad cry spilled from Allen's cracked lips, and the redhead became a streak of crazed greased lightning. Before Barker could cry out a warning, Allen had leaped free of his chains, scooped up the can of TNT and gone racing along the path after the Germans.

Barker cursed and roared at the top of his voice. But he didn't dare shoot because Allen's speeding figure was directly between his gun and the others.

"Get to the last plane, Mike!" he finally barked and gave the big fellow a shove. "I've got to catch Allen. He's off his nut, and doesn't know what he's doing. You get to the plane. I'll get Allen!"

Cheviski shouted something but Barker heard it just as a muffled roar. He was already pounding down the path after Allen. But with every stride he took his heart became a colder lump of lead in his throat.

The redhead was far out in front of him and gaining on the two Germans and Miller with every step. Then suddenly, when Barker lost them to view for an instant, and went tearing

around a bend in the path, he put on the brakes hard and flung himself flat on the ground.

He had reached the clearing along the edge of the little lake. The U-boat piers were no more than a hundred yards away. Miller had seemingly vanished into thin air, but the two Germans were leaping on the deck of the nearest submarine and racing toward the conning tower.

Screamed orders poured from their lips as they ran, but every sailor on deck froze motionless as though permanently paralyzed. And well they might freeze solid, for they saw a human torpedo come sailing through the air.

Allen, clutching the can of TNT against his chest, hurled his body straight off the edge of the pier to crash down on the deck of the U-boat.

His body struck and then there was a great sheet of livid red flame that belched high up into the air, and seemed to spread out over the whole world. A split second later there came sound as though mighty, invisible giants had split the earth in two. The ground heaved and shook under Barker, and his head felt as though it were going to fly apart in small pieces.

Through a whirlwind of red flame and black smoke he saw the U-boat break in two and rise right up out of the water. The stern half let go, and actually sailed through the air to crash down on the bow of the second boat. Instantly the place was rocked by a second and perhaps even more terrific explosion, and the little lake became a boiling, seething cauldron of doom.

BARKER knew that he must be flying apart in all directions. Yet at the same time he realized that he had his legs under him and had spun around and was racing madly back up the path. Figures came racing toward him but he swerved by them, and probably wasn't even seen by the fear-stricken Germans running blindly toward the scene of disaster.

Then suddenly he was within sight of the planes. He saw his pals in the pits, all turned and staring back at him. Cheviski was in the rear plane, standing up and waving his arms like

a madman. Putting every ounce of strength into his legs Barker cupped a hand to his mouth.

"Start engines, and go!" he bel-
lowed. "Start—"

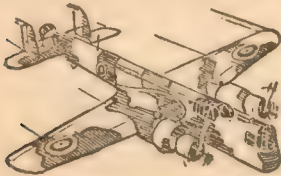
He never finished. At that moment a figure in German uniform popped into sight from the right. He was one of the guards, and carried a rifle in his hand. Oblivious to Barker, the man dropped to his knee and took a bead on Cheviski's big figure towering up out of the rear pit of the end Dauntless.

But sight and action were one for Barker. While in mid-stride he flung up his hand that still clutched the Luger and squeezed the trigger. The

Finally, Barker gunned his engine and went roaring along the take-off run. But, as though his parting was some kind of a signal to the gods, or somebody, the little uncharted cay became a thundering, blazing inferno in the Caribbean. Stored fuel, oil, and everything else let go. And as Barker cleared his wheels and went prop-screaming upward he turned in the seat to stare back down at a Nature-made death-trap.

The U-boat commander had said that there were two hundred on that cay. Well, if true, there would be nothing but two hundred fried corpses when that blaze died down. He shuddered and turned front.

*Over the icy wastes of Greenland, the fire of war suddenly
flares up—and Perry Nolan is catapulted into a welter of action*



IN WINGS OF THE NORTH

An Exciting Complete Air Battle Novelet

By JOHNSTON CARROLL

Coming in the Next Issue

German fired his rifle but he wasn't pointing it at Cheviski by then. Barker's slugs had hit him and bowled him over. His bullet went ripping harmlessly up through the tentlike tropical foliage above him.

Four seconds later Barker reached the end Dauntless and scrambled up into the pit. Clinton, in the first ship, was already banging down the man-made runway. He was off and away in a flash. Then Duffy in the second plane went off. Then the third ship that had only one figure in the pit. Harris. Allen's flying partner was taking off without his pal. But he didn't leave until he looked back at Barker and received the meaningful shake of a head signal.

"Poor old Allen!" he muttered hoarsely. "But, he wanted just one more crack at them, and . . . And I guess you're kind of happy, now, aren't you, fellow? You saved—"

He cut short the rest as Cheviski's fist banged down on his shoulder, and the big fellow's voice boomed in his ears.

"Hey, Admiral, look! We still got unfinished business. There's that Vought-Sikorski getting altitude. And that rat, Miller, must be in the pit. Swing us over while I pepper him like he should get!"

Barker turned and stared out across the air space at the utility plane prop-clawing upward and to the south. He also saw the three Douglas Dauntless

planes ahead of him swerve sharply and go banging off in that direction. Then he glanced back at Cheviski and shook his head.

NO DICE, Mike!" he called and waved a hand at the other three planes. "They took more of a beating than we did. That rat is their dish."

"Yeah, I guess you're right, Admiral," Cheviski grunted, just a little sadly. "But say! I ain't thanked you for saving my life. Thanks! Boy, did you knock over that guy. Some shooting. Am I glad you were along!"

"You got that last twisted around, and how, Mike!" Barker cried. "And how, and how!"

"Huh?" the big fellow gulped with a scowl. "What do you mean, and how?"

"You'll find out when they pin the Navy Cross on you!" Barker said. "Right now, get going on that radio. Get a bearing on a couple of stations and give me a course."

"And I know just the two stations!" Cheviski cried happily. "Both hot bands this time of day, and . . . But, hey! Buckley said—"

"An emergency, Mike!" Barker stopped him. "We're lost, aren't we? Or we can say we were, can't we?"

Mike Cheviski didn't reply. A blast of hot licks from Madri What's-his-name's boys did that for him.

*Lieutenants Stud Stacey and Jake Bell, Aircraft Carrier Pilots, Undertake
a Secret Mission That Lands Them in an Axis Jail — But
They Keep the Nazis Guessing in*

MALTA MASQUERADE

A Gripping Air-War Novelet

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

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The air shuddered and vacuum snatched away Martin's breath

TWENTY MINUTES TO HELL

By LAURENCE DONOVAN

Pilot Dan Martin sees his duty written on the face of a copper penny—and prepares to make the supreme sacrifice!

CLINT MALLARD, pilot lieutenant, drew the death penny. He picked it from among twenty-two, pocket-worn pennies in the black hat, made blacker by the darkness. If cold beads of sweat popped out on Mallard's youthful face, they were concealed by the moist veil of the tropical night.

"Check your watches," said Flight Commander Joyce, glancing at the luminous dial on his wrist. "When my fingers snap it will be five-ten exactly. At five-forty dawn will break, and I mean break."

"Up like thunder outa China 'cross the bay," quoted one of the twenty-two shadows about the planes on the

line. "Kipling knew his stuff. That's the way the sun comes up—with a crash."

"We'll forego Kipling," said Commander Joyce a bit tensely. "At five-twenty we take off for Luzon and hope we have a clear sky above Palau. The yellow sons are thick there. When we hop off that will leave exactly twenty minutes to sunrise."

"Twenty minutes to hell for Mallard," growled the voice which had quoted Kipling.

"Can it, you chump!" The tone was brittle. The words came from Pilot Officer Dan Martin. In the darkness, he added, "Commander, may Jenkins hold the Curtiss last on the line? I'd like a word with Mallard on the take-off. I won't hold up the flight."

"Sure, Lieutenant Martin, but make it snappy," assented Commander Joyce. "We're taking a chance with the take-off lights, and we'll have to get altitude during that twenty minutes of darkness, if the Japs aren't already lying up there waiting."

"Right, sir!" replied Dan Martin, hoping that Commander Joyce could not read his mind and that none of the others might guess his intention.

Clint Mallard was Virginia Mallard's kid brother. Virginia would have been Mrs. Dan Martin now if the Japs had postponed by only a few days their historical sneak act at Pearl Harbor.

"Surest thing you know, sweetheart, I'll look after the kid," had been Dan Martin's promise, back at the San Diego base.

Most of the survivors of the Forty-fourth Squadron understood how it was between Dan Martin and Clint Mallard's sister.

EQUATORIAL stars spangled the moonless sky in the canopy over the coral and volcanic island down close to Longitude 140, and only a few points of Latitude north of the big girdle. Tonight the job of the Forty-fourth Squadron was finally cleaned up.

For nearly a month, the tough naval outfit had sweated and burned and beaten off Jap attacks while submarines entered the deep island lagoon. The submarines, sometimes under fire,

had refueled from the oil stock in the dugout tanks here.

The pig boats had gone on their way to continue their dangerous, lurking patrol around the Jap islands of Palau and Yap. On this tiny, unnamed island which boiled under the equatorial sun every day, and sweated from its rocks at night, the Forty-fourth had dwindled from forty-eight flying officers to tonight's twenty-two.

The last ton of oil was gone. The island's last pool of fresh water was now only a few stinking gallons. The time had arrived to shove off.

Every morning for a week now, as soon as dawn picked the island out of the night, with the crashing suddenness of tropical sunrise, bombers of the Rising Sun had attacked. Luckily, cave pockets in the black volcanic rock afforded bomb shelter, and a field had been contrived of crushed coral and sand near the flat, black beach.

The flight had learned quickly to be in the sky at dawn to meet and intercept the bombing attack, which had been beaten back from the last of the stored oil. But half of the Grumman Wildcats were somewhere out there in the hot sea.

Twenty-six of the original forty-eight naval flyers required no burial, only funeral rites of island flowers left floating by the grim command.

Early tonight, Commander Joyce had issued the order. Working in darkness, the surviving ground crew and the twenty-two flyers had mined the landing field and beach throughout. Every available explosive, except that needed for fighting their way over the hostile Jap islands to Luzon and Manila, was planted in the field. Big Navy flying boats had evacuated the ground crew personnel.

When it was done, and battery contact wires were run into a camouflaged shelter of jagged black rocks, Commander Joyce had made his announcement. These twenty-two, grim, weary young fighters had known it must come. They could not take off over contact mines.

"One of us must remain behind," said Commander Joyce. "When they see we're gone, the dawn bombers will undoubtedly land. We've planted enough explosive to blow the yellow

sons to their shamed ancestors, but we want to get all of them."

Dan Martin, as well as the others, had understood. One Jap plane might set off a contact mine, but others would be warned and stay aloft. It meant a battery set-off after all or nearly all Jap planes had landed.

"My job, sir!" The first to snap that out had been Dan Martin. But it had become an immediate chorus.

"I am compelled by regulations to take this flight out," said Commander Joyce. "But this will be an even chance for all. I have exactly twenty-two pennies. Among them is just one with the date of 1924. The lucky man will get that penny from the hat."

NONE could see young Clint Mallard's sweating face in the darkness as each of the command in turn gripped his hand.

"Blow 'em to hell, an' luck, fellow," was repeated over and over again. "You'll blast 'em, and make it out."

A single-seater Grumman Wildcat fighter was being left in the camouflaging rocks. The black box with its detonating plunger was concealed near it. The motor of the Wildcat was gassed and set, but the man who must wait "twenty minutes to hell" had to take a chance on wiping out the landing bombers, starting the motor, and evading any of the yellow sons who might remain cautiously in the sky.

"He won't have one chance in a thousand," gritted Dan Martin under his breath. "If the kid had been in it longer, if he had met up with the Saber and fought it out like some of the rest of us, he might squeeze out by the skin of his teeth."

Down the line ready for the take-off, Dan Martin saw the shadow of Commander Joyce beside the Douglas, three-place Devastator, the squadron's single torpedo ship. The commander was riding this light, all torpedoes being buried with other explosives in that deadly beach trap.

There were three Curtiss Scouts and three Vought-Sikorsky Vindicators, dive bombers, with slowly idling motors. The beams of the field lights were to be flashed on briefly.

At ten seconds of five-twenty, Commander Joyce himself flashed the

lights. One by one, wings almost touching, the ships made the beach run.

Commander Joyce snapped off the lights, taking his own chance at getting the Sikorsky torpedo ship off in the darkness.

"Get set, Martin, Jenkins!" he called out. "Luck, Mallard, and we'll see you in Manila!"

The Sikorsky Devastator roared. Commander Joyce carried two men of the squadron with him as he took off neatly in the blackness. Dan Martin was standing beside the two-place Curtiss Scout, with Pilot Jenkins looking over the edge of the cockpit.

Martin's heart skipped and his breath clutched at his throat. He turned to young Mallard, seeing his white face dimly in the darkness.

It was exactly five-twenty. Exactly twenty minutes to hell, pounded in Martin's brain.

"Well, Dan, I'll be seein' you," managed Mallard with a short, forced laugh. "But if I should miss, you tell sis. I want her to be proud."

"Sure, Clint, sure!" grunted Martin, extending his hand in the darkness. "I want her to be proud, too."

Martin snapped up his suddenly clenched fist with every ounce of weight he could put behind it. Young Mallard's white face jerked upward and Martin hoped that crunching crack wasn't a broken jaw.

"What goes on? Say?"

Jenkins questioned sharply from the rear pit of the Curtiss as he heard the smacking blow. Martin picked up the limp body of young Mallard over one shoulder, then heaved him upward over the edge of the forward cockpit.

"Give 'er the gun, Jenks!" he rapped out. "He'll be out for an hour or so, I hope! So he'd be no good here, it being only twenty minutes to hell!"

The thunder of the departing flight formation still hung on the hot air. Lieutenant Jenkins snapped a salute.

"You darn crazy lunkhead!" he yelled as his motor revved to a scream. "Luck, fellow!"

Slipstream sand stung Martin's face, got into his eyes, and the Curtiss roared away. He stood with a hard, satisfied grin on his broad mouth, clutching a penny he had taken from

the sweat-damp hand of young Mal-lard.

TWENTY minutes to hell!" Dan Martin muttered the words half consciously, then watched the luminous dial of his watch and checked off, "Fifteen minutes to hell."

He kept his eyes off his watch after that. For five minutes he climbed into the Grumman Wildcat, touching the starter tentatively, hoping the motor would catch on the first snap.

He passed another five minutes going over the guns, caressing the triggers, and sliding the plexiglass dome back and forth over the cockpit.

"Four minutes!"

Martin dropped down. He stood beside the square black box with its short plunger, his fingers working the handle just a trifle. Through the wires from that box would flash instant hell for whatever might be on that landing field.

Each morning for a week, the Jap bombers had appeared within five to ten minutes after the tropical sun came boiling out of the hot sea. Martin remembered there had at first been twenty of the raiders, but yesterday morning there had been only eleven.

"And one of them was the Saber," he said tensely. "Smith and Stevens, Larkins and Jolly, Simms and Davis—the Saber got them all."

He was thinking of the ace of that Rising Sun squadron, a devil in the air if there ever was one.

"And I had three chances at him and missed," grated Martin. "I thought I knew all the tricks, but he copped them all."

Twice Martin had been left floating down, his planes flaming and spiraling into the sea. By sheer luck, missing sharks and machine-gun fire of merciless yellow flyers, he had survived and been picked up.

"Two minutes—to hell for the Saber," he said slowly now, a hand lovingly upon the handle of the detonator battery box. "No, Saber, this time I can't miss. If only you'll land first with that damn sword painted in blood under your Rising Sun. If you'll only—"

His watch said, "A minute and a half to hell, Dan Martin," and his

speech broke off. He took it up again:

"No, not that way. The other yellow devils, yes. But the Saber, he has to know! He put me down twice! All of them but the Saber!"

He flashed his pencil light, shielding it under his hand so it might not be seen from the sky, and looked at the copper penny, wet from the sweat of his hand. The faint silhouette of a face was there. An angular face with a huge nose. More faintly he could make out the minute letters of a word—"Liberty."

It was just behind the shaggy head of the rugged man who had said, "That liberty shall not perish from the earth—government of the people, by the people and for the people—"

He read his duty there. A duty beyond his personal desire. If possible, all of the Jap planes must be destroyed.

"But the Saber has to know," he repeated doggedly.

His watch said, "half a minute to hell."

And as if the great sun itself was humming upward for its crashing zoom out of the sea, he heard the vague buzzing in the sky.

"They're coming, right on the dot—right on the minute of hell itself," muttered Martin.

The red ball of the sun flooded the tiny rocky island with flaming, scorching light and heat. As if they had soared out of the sea, at first like a small flock of gulls, growing larger, rising over the curve of the earth, came the grim bombers of the Rising Sun.

Dan Martin lay crouched in the rocks, peering upward through a narrow crack, wholly invisible from the sky. Before their glasses could have told them that the anti-aircraft guns would be silent, that no hidden American hawks waited ready to pounce into the heavens, the smart yellow pilots broke formation.

They were scattered at five thousand, still not much larger than gulls. One by one they started thundering dives, dropping downward like vultures. And one by one they pulled out flat, banking, and surveying the desolation of the landing beach and the rocks.

"Whatever the Nipponese cuss words, they're using 'em all," muttered Martin. "If only something doesn't happen to wise 'em up. An' there's the Saber!"

The ace with the bloody sword across his Rising Sun insignia was dropping lower than the others. He was edging closer. His fellow flyers held off, alternately idling and zooming.

Martin groaned. "The Saber himself would be the first down," he said wryly. "So he'll never know. You'd think the Saber would be smarter than that, or yellower than the others maybe."

Martin almost whooped with elation. He had called the turn. The Saber apparently had assured himself that the wily Americans had faded out in the darkness. But the great Saber was taking no chances.

FLASHING upward, the pilot with the bloody sword dipped a wing. Ten other planes formed and climbed. The Saber's wing dipped again. A single plane separated from the rest and glided down on a cut-off motor.

"Clever when it comes to saving their yellow hides," said Martin softly. "One will test the landing field. But it isn't the Saber."

Sweat ran cold for the next two minutes down Martin's spine. The Jap flyer landed perfectly. Martin could just make out his yellow face through the plexiglass coop.

Then the landed pilot gunned his motor. He taxied from end to end of the long beach and landing field. He winged around and taxied again, criss-crossing the smooth sand and crushed coral.

One arm came out of the plexiglass coop. The Jap had signaled the landing field was safe.

The other planes roared now, swooping down. But Martin's breath caught, and the heat seemed to choke him. The first yellow flyer was climbing from the cockpit. He was walking across the landing beach, coming straight toward the rocks where Martin, the Grumman Wildcat fighter, and the black box were concealed.

Martin whispered oaths. His hand gripped his side automatic. If he

could only shoot the squat yellow-faced man without the shot being heard.

The highest of the dropping planes were still roaring enough to drown out the shot. But the puff of death smoke might be seen. The yellow flyer on the ground was still out in the open. His fellow killers would see him fall.

One plane landed. The wheels of another touched. Then a third. The others were stringing behind them. Martin had to take a desperate chance. He was seeing the walking yellow flyer now through a narrow gap between volcanic rocks, and the Jap was coming straight toward it.

Once there he could not miss seeing the camouflaged Wildcat. Martin risked everything on the flying jump he made from one rock to another. He could only hope that pilots busy landing could not be looking his way, and that the single plane still in the air would not spot him.

He won to a position beside the rocky gap and hunched down. The sweat on his forehead was icy. It beaded and the salt moisture ran into his eyes.

There was only the thunder of the single plane still up now. All other motors had idled or had been cut off. The last of ten planes were out there on the beach, and all were sitting right over blasting hell.

The Jap flyer had his helmet off, mopping his yellow, oily face. His mouth opened for a warning yell, but only a choking gasp came from between his bared white teeth.

Martin's heavy automatic crushed the bone between the slanting eyes. Then Martin was jumping back toward the black box.

Dan Martin knew that as long as he lived, if he survived now, he would dream of the awfulness of that final hell he set off. With teeth gritted, eyes turned away as soon as he made sure ten Jap planes had landed on the mined field, Martin pushed the battery plunger.

The air shuddered and sudden vacuum snatched away Martin's breath, hurling him to his knees. The tiny island seemed to rock and pitch like a tin-can destroyer in a rough sea.

Martin's eyes turned upward. He closed them. Rocks mingled with mushrooming black smoke. From the edges of this lethal cloud hurtled parts of Jap ships, reduced to broken metal.

Martin tried not to see the human figures, rising slowly, then falling with arms and legs sprawling, poised oddly like oversize dolls.

THE hell was over. The improvised landing field was a cratered graveyard. In its death pits lay the yellow pilots. There were the shattered parts of seven Jap dive bombers and three fighter ships, as Martin had checked them coming down.

So empty and sick for the moment that his thoughts were temporarily frozen, Martin forgot the Saber in his sword-marked fighter plane. And as his brain functioned again, he became aware of a bad break of luck.

He had been aware that rocks and metal had rained upon the rocks under which he was sheltered. Now he was staring at a jumbled mass made up of tons of volcanic rock and coral.

The ripped up ground was a rough wall that only machinery and days of work could have removed. And this wall effectively blocked the only way by which he could have taxied the Grumman Wildcat to the strip of beach which had been kept clear of explosives for the purpose of his own final take-off.

Dan Martin was locked on the island with his Grumman, as securely as if the plane had ceased to exist. The stubby, single-engined Wildcat, with its recently installed .50 caliber machine-guns, sat there, cockily ready to hop, but with no place to go.

Sudden diving thunder of the Saber's ship snapped Martin's eyes upward. In his distraction over the plight of his plane, Martin had moved into the open.

The Saber's guns cut loose a burst that sprayed lethal rain on the rocks about Martin. Only the American flyer's instant drop and roll under the lightly armored fuselage of the Wildcat saved him from death.

Even as he became aware of curiously numbed spots in the muscles of one leg and on the top of his left

shoulder, Martin's tight-set teeth released an oath of satisfaction.

He added, "And anyway, it's me an' not the kid brother. Saber, you've got all the advantage, but—"

After his machine-gunning burst, the Saber had roared over, pulled into a sharp bank and climbed. He was coming back to hand Martin more of the same ruthless steel.

Once more Martin escaped, this time under the overhang of a volcanic rock. He was fully aware that he could expect no mercy, and inside he felt that, having performed his death-dealing duty, he deserved none.

"It's all in the game," he grated. "An' I guess there'll be no wedding bells when the shindig's all over. Best that way perhaps."

This time the Saber took a longer time winging over, then zooming for altitude. And Martin remembered with sickening realization that some of these Jap fighter planes were equipped with light bombs, attached to special releases under the cockpit of the pilot. He risked climbing the rocks, watching the Saber's newest maneuver.

"That's the ticket," said Martin softly. "Only when he dive-bombs this spot, I don't have to be here. I can dodge him all over the island. Sure. I can make the devil land, and when he does I can be ready for him with—"

Instinctively he lifted his side automatic. He ceased speaking and his breath was trapped in his throat. Even as the Saber's motor roared into a direct dive above him, Martin was tearing frantically at the shell magazine of the .45.

Perhaps it had happened when he had smashed down the yellow flyer coming upon him, or it had more likely been caused by his first sudden dive into the rocks. The automatic was jammed and the side of the butt holding the magazine was broken.

Not a single shot could be fired from it. Even with the thunder of the diving Saber above him, Martin ran toward the place where he had downed the Jap flyer, hoping to secure a small gun.

Behind him a light bomb seemed to crash the earth, sea and sky into one fusion of explosion which hurled him

a dozen feet and left him stunned. He got up, slowly, again hearing the maneuvering climb of the Saber.

He watched the Jap fighter plane. This time the Saber was taking an inventory of what his attack had brought. He was flying on an idled motor, slowly spiraling downward.

"He's sure as hell that he rooted me out that time," said Martin. "If I can only keep him believing that an' get that Jap flyer's gun, the Saber may land on the open strip of beach outside the busted ships."

THEN Martin's throat went dry, so dry he would have gulped some of the stinking water left in the last pool if he could have reached it. He was staring at the spot where he had downed the Jap flyer.

The soft volcanic rock of the gap in which he had ambushed the yellow son had been shattered by the terrific blast of the landing field. Even if the Jap flyer's gun might have been useful, it was buried with his body far under the crumbled walls.

Martin crept to one side, lying quiet. Perhaps the Saber, if he believed he had got the American, would head away. In this Martin was disappointed.

Apparently the Saber had another target in mind. He had seen the hidden Grumman. He was gliding down again, either to try for a beach landing or to attempt a finishing blast on the plane itself.

Martin scarcely knew what impulse started him running toward the Wildcat. It was impossible for him to get the plane out or into the air but, as with every flyer, the ship assigned to him was a sacred possession to be saved.

The Saber, undoubtedly maddened by now at the failure of his wasted ammunition, cut loose with half a dozen synchronized machine-guns. It seemed to Martin that the burst must rip the Grumman apart, as the hail of steel cut through the fuselage back of the cockpit.

But as the Saber went over beyond range, Martin was climbing desperately, dragging one wounded leg. Then he was in the Grumman cockpit, having no definite thought unless it

might have been the ghost of an idea that he would prefer to die with the ship.

"I'll smash the bus myself first," he said hoarsely, automatically buzzing the starter.

The motor caught. The prop whirled. Martin stared at the trigger of the .50 caliber guns, at the mechanism by which he could operate one, or two, or all in unison.

"If I could only shift those damn' drillers," he muttered.

Suddenly he scarcely heeded the renewed life of the Saber's humming motor in the sky. He was looking at the slanting pile of black rock and earth straight ahead of the Wildcat's nose.

"Jumpin' cats!" he breathed. "If it could be worked! It'd be the first time—"

The Grumman Wildcat took the thundering rev-up of its propeller like a living thing. Its steel-blasted fuselage quivered and moved. Martin sent the ship onto the slanted rocks, jerking its nose and the rim of its wings upward.

Martin's lips moved stiffly as he fixed his eyes upon the crossed hair-line of the gunsights. He was praying under his breath. He could see a patch of the bright, blue tropical sky.

And into it moved a plane. The Japs may have employed some rare Nipponese oaths as they were about to die, but they could never compare with the round of good American profanity that rolled from Martin's constricted throat.

This trailed off into, "The crazy, soft-brained fools! I might've known the kid an' Jenks would pull something like that!"

The plane he saw briefly through the sights was without doubt the two-place Curtiss in which he had sent Clint Mallard, as he had hoped, to safety.

"An' neither Jenks nor the kid, even if he's conscious, could stand up to the Saber's tricks long enough for one good crack at the blasted yellow killer!"

Martin groaned. For he could see that the Curtiss was being put into a long diving, glide. And for the few seconds of time he could hear the

Saber's motor, but could not see his ship.

It was apparent that the crazy Jenks, Lieutenant Jenkins, must be hurling his ship recklessly downward for an attack upon the Jap ace who had downed six of the Forty-fourth's flyers, and shot Martin himself out of the sky twice.

MARTIN twisted his neck, seeking the Saber. And he heard that wily fighter's motor to the rear of his Grumman, with his ship held so low he must be wave-hopping.

"An' all set to rip the belly of the Curtiss with one of his low wing-overs", muttered Martin. "That nutty Jenks is too dead set on what's happened on the island to be smart an' make the Jap come to him."

His words still were hanging on the air when the smoking tracers streamed from the Curtiss. They were not badly aimed, but the Saber's wave-hopping was converted into a side-slipping zoom that even Martin had to admire.

At the same instant, the Saber triggered his guns. Martin saw the double tracer streams seem to mingle. He was shouting without realizing it. For the Curtiss appeared to stagger to one side as if mortally hit.

And it was then that the Saber's low-flying maneuver carried him upward. Martin was so fascinated, so possessed of sickness watching the now side-slipping Curtiss, fearing a burst of deadly flame, that he almost missed what was right before his eyes.

The Saber was crossing the hair-line gunights of the Grumman Wildcat where its nose was reared up on the jagged rocks.

Martin's fingers tightened on the trigger release as if his fingers would never straighten again. His .50-caliber guns rocked the tilted Wildcat with their burst of hurtling steel.

Martin's hand was still clenched, his body rigid, as he saw the Saber's ship change its course abruptly. Smoke poured from behind its propeller, streaming back over the Saber's cockpit.

Even then, the Saber was good, and smart enough to jerk the ship's nose upward as he cut the throttle and flattened the wings in a stall. The smok-

ing plane poised, threatened to do a back turn, and then was dropping toward the shoaling water where it came onto the island beach.

Martin was out of the Wildcat, limping, staggering, but managing to run across the wrecked terrain. For he saw the Saber's figure hurtle from the cockpit and land with a splash clear of his crashing plane.

And Martin was in the slow rolling surf up to his shoulders, meeting the Saber as he swam in, gained a footing and lifted his head. Martin smashed ahead, and he drove harder because of the one thing he had seen and the shouted words he had heard.

The Saber was a white man, and the words were guttural German oaths. Perhaps neither man had the advantage, only Martin had the fierce thought that Virginia Mallard's brother and Jenks, crazy old Jenks, were down somewhere among the sharks on the other side of the island.

Martin took smashes from the Nazi's fists, but gave out two for every one. And it was brief and beautiful when the Nazi Saber attempted to use a Luger holstered under his arm.

Martin rapped into him then with everything he had, forgetting a sore shoulder and a numbed leg. When he held the Saber under, then pulled him up just in time to keep him alive, Martin had barely the strength to drag him through the shallow water to the beach.

Salt water and sand slapped into his eyes. He was afraid to open them and look. For it was the slipstream of a motor that almost blinded him.

Clint Mallard was first to climb stiffly from the Curtiss cockpit and alight upon the black sand. Martin saw Pilot Jenkins peering over the side with one eye, because the other was tightly closed and swollen!

Martin started to speak, his head spinning. He must have grinned without knowing it. He got out. "Hello, Clint." But his grin had an amazing effect.

Without a word, young Mallard whipped out a fist at the end of a long arm. Knuckles cracked under Martin's jaw and as he went down he had the hope that that crack wasn't a

broken bone. "That's the only reason I came all the way back," said young Mallard grimly, looking down at Martin who decided to sit the next one out. "Now give me that penny."

MARTIN just sat there. He glanced over at Jenks and the pilot rubbed a hand over his closed eye and drawled, "I'd give the kid back his penny, Martin. He smacked me, too, when I thought he was still out, an' took over. So here we are."

Martin was fishing in a pocket. His fingers gripped the penny. I'll tell Virginia she can be proud of you, Clint, but we'll sure catch hell from the skipper when and if we make Luzon," he said. "But as for the penny——"

"Give me that penny!" blazed young Mallard. "You may be marryin' sis, but darned if you're big brotherin' me!"

"Okay, Clint," said Martin hastily, but then he looked at the now reviving Nazi, the Saber, killer of the skies. "That's the last an' only time I'll try knockin' you out of the war, but only the three of us can possibly ride the two holes in the Curtiss. It's lucky there's gas enough in the Grumman to fill it up again for the hop to Luzon."

"Are you giving me that penny, or do I have to hand you another one, fella?" snapped young Mallard.

The Saber sat up, rubbed his chin. He burst forth in fairly good Americanese then.

"When a prisoner you take, he is owed being treated the American way! You will me take in the ship!"

"Wait, Clint!" Martin was on his feet. "Neither you nor I have any use for this penny. As for you, Saber, it's just too almighty bad. Three of us,

two in-one pit, will crowd that Curtiss.

"You've been wantin' this island and, *Herr* Saber or whatever your name is, it's all yours. There's enough stinkin' water to keep you alive until it rains, an' there are clams an' crabs.

"Mister, the island's yours, an' here's a lucky penny that goes with it. It's a penny, *Herr* Saber, with the face of a man called Abe Lincoln, and right behind it a word you might learn to spell. We call it 'Liberty.'

"That okay, Clint?"

Young Mallard grinned then.

"Okay," he said. "You said we'd catch hell when we hit Luzon. Jenks never caught up with the flight. I smacked him down before we could pick up the squadron, an' who's to know who punched who or why."

As a Curtiss roared off, with two fliers jammed in one cockpit, the Nazi Saber sat on the black sand. He stared at the small, copper coin in his hand, at the silhouette of the rugged face, the big nose and the shaggy hair.

Perhaps he could see another face, a small face, pale and brutal, with a wisp of a mustache that never could give it either dignity or humaneness.

The Nazi Saber lifted the penny in a movement to hurl it into the sea. He repeated a guttural word, studying the tiny letters behind the head of Lincoln.

"*Freiheit?*" He shook his head. "Nein."

"Leeber——"

The Saber changed his mind and slipped the penny into a pocket. He appeared still puzzled, baffled.

Dan Martin, winging way toward Luzon and Manila, could have told the Saber that the word "Liberty" is not to be found in the Nazi language.

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To right and left the catapulted planes were blowing apart and bursting into flames

CLAY PIGEON OF THE A. E. F.

By JOSEPH J. MILLARD

CHAPTER I

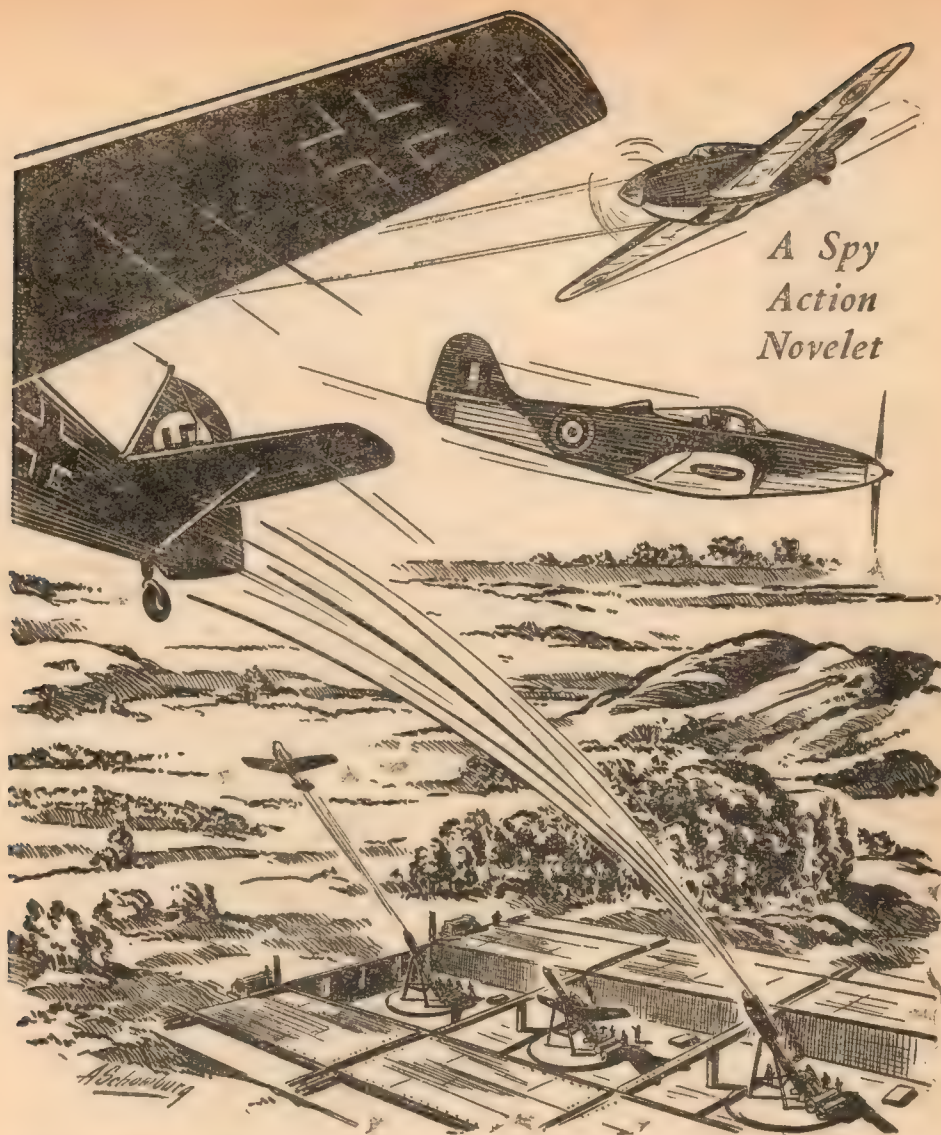
Marked for Murder

IT WAS supposed to have been a surprise!

The Yanks landed in Northern Ireland on a gray day and slogged

through the mud to their camps, the clean new barracks with concrete foundations that for a year had been prepared for them. A band played, newspaper correspondents took innumerable pictures and the crowds cheered for the first contingent of

Yank Lieutenant Clay Faces Grim Peril



*A Spy
Action
Novelet*

America's new Expeditionary Force. They made quite a fuss over the Yanks.

BUT privately, in all quarters, people wondered. They wondered about this magnificent Air Force they had been hearing so much about. An AEF of infantrymen, ostensibly to help guard England against the threatened spring invasion was all nice and welcome.

But where were those dare-devil fighting pilots who had promised to come over and carry a little inferno into Adolf's own back yard?

And people wondered, too, about the soldiers themselves. Most of them were neat, erect, capable-looking fighting men with the marks of careful training in their movements. But here and there through the lines of landing men, onlookers saw little groups in sloppy, ill-fitting uniforms

to Blast a Hidden Nazi Catapult Drome!

—men who carried their rifles as though the weapons were strange to them, men who somehow spoiled the neat coordination of the rest.

"What the devil?" some of the news correspondents asked one another in private. "Is America so hard up for fighting men that she has to send raw rookies across without even time for training in the rudiments of drill and the manual of arms? Something's haywire somewhere."

And something was—but not the way the onlookers suspected.

The second night in Ireland, these misfit "rookies" were quietly sifted out of the main body of the troops. Leaving their rifles back in the barracks, these men marched through the darkness to a distant surfaced field where transport planes waited, their motors bumbling quietly in the midnight hush. The misfits climbed aboard. Plane after plane roared off, heading eastward over the North Channel and down across the Irish Sea.

The next dawn, the hard-fighting lads of Britain's incomparable R.A.F. arose with the sun and jogged out onto their tarmacs in fighter dromes from the Channel to the North Sea. Some of them were wondering about America's pilots, too, and about the neat additions: American engineers had been building onto the British dromes—additions that so far stood empty.

THE fighter pilots came from their quarters and came face to face with other fighter pilots—strangers in strange, trim uniforms. And these strangers were coming out of the hitherto empty Yank quarters.

The Yanks had come in the night! America's new Air Force Combat Command was on the job. Disguised as rookie infantrymen, their identities a secret from even their own seasick bunkmates, the cream of Yank fighting flyers had arrived at the battle front, ready for the surprise of their appearance to strike a smashing blow at Nazi morale.

It was supposed to have been a total surprise! It would have been, except for one man—Lieutenant Mike Clay. . . .

There was a lot of hand-shaking and back-slapping and general heart-warming welcome by the lads of the R.A.F. A rangy Britisher with the scar of a Rheinmettal-Borsig slug under his chin singled Mike Clay out of the group.

"Marsden," the rangy man introduced himself, grinning. "I jolly well had to meet you, you know. You're my kind of chap, what?" He measured Mike Clay's own rangy six-feet-one. "The Old Girl must have made us both from the same mold."

"Mike Clay, New York," Clay responded, shoving out his hand. "A tall man is sort of a novelty in your outfit."

They wandered away from the crowd, chatting comfortably. Over on one side of the field Spitfires and "Hurry-boxes", as the British call their Hurricanes, were being warmed. On the other side, ground crews were working around a row of sleek, deadly Airacobras, each bearing the dotted star of the U. S. Air Force.

These flying arsenals, with their hard-hitting 37 mm. nose-cannon and .30 and .50 caliber machine-guns would be zooming up soon, carrying American defiance to the minions of hate across the Channel.

The sight of them brought a lump into Mike Clay's throat. The War Department had pulled a good one on Goering. Here were American planes and American pilots, champing at the bit. American mechanics were making final check-ups. American armorers were loading cartridge belts and drums. American sentries were pacing their beats around the field. The Yanks had come—and how!

"I hear we're going up with you fellows this morning," Clay remarked to his companion. "Sort of godfather job for you until we get our air-legs and the lay of the land again."

Marsden's face clouded. "So I hear. And it's either a rum time or the very best for you chaps to appear. I'm not sure which."

"What do you mean?" Clay demanded sharply.

Marsden shrugged grimly. "Old Nasty's up to something over there across the Channel," he said tightly. "We can't find out what, but it's no

fun, whatever it is. We'd been getting consistent whispers of some new secret weapon being perfected but nobody paid much attention. That sort of talk goes on constantly, you know. But yesterday two patrols went out and—" He hesitated. "Well, they simply didn't come back."

"Shot down?" Clay asked.

"Probably. But, not to boast, old man, it's unusual for Jerry to wipe a whole flight out, no matter what the odds. Set us all to wondering if maybe this new weapon might not be the goods."

"Cheer up." Clay grinned, slapping Marsden's back. "America has a few secrets of her own to uncork before long and—"

There was no warning at all. A hundred yards away, at the edge of the tarmac, an American sentry attempted a hasty present arms for a group of passing brass hats. Maybe he was nervous; maybe the manual of arms was still too new to be second nature.

THE trigger of the sentry's rifle caught in a button of his uniform. There was a sharp, blasting *spang*. Something invisible but deadly whined between Mike Clay and Marsden, touching Clay's ear-tip and cheek with a kiss of liquid fire. He stumbled, gave Marsden a hard shove that sent him reeling back, and went down to hands and knees.

For a moment there was bedlam. The sentry was surrounded by officers and men. Everyone was running, forming knots around the babbling sentry or around Mike Clay who was getting up slowly, mopping at the line of blood along his cheek.

"Get a doctor, somebody!" Marsden shouted, putting a hand under Clay's elbow. "This man's been shot."

"Skip it," Mike Clay growled, shaking off the hand. "I'm all right. Just nicked the skin—that's all."

But Clay's face was ash-white, his hands were shaking and his eyes were like blue ice with a raging fire under the frozen surface. "It's here in England," his mind was saying dully. "I thought I'd shaken it off but it followed me here."

They brought the weeping, bab-

bling sentry over. Clay's flight leader, Captain Olcott, white-faced and grim.

"Sure you're not hurt, Lieutenant?" he insisted. "This fool sentry had his rifle cocked, against regulations. It was the kind of accident that might have killed somebody. I'd like to see him—"

"Skip it," Mike Clay said tightly.

He said it again when the sentry, who looked like a scared kid from some Mid-western farm, made a nuisance of himself blubbering apologies and protestations. Finally a couple of guards led the kid away.

"What'll be done with him?" Clay asked.

"Not much," Captain Olcott said, through his teeth. "Throw the fear of judgment into him, is about all we can do. It was a plain accident, in sight of a dozen witnesses. The fool!"

Mike Clay suddenly rammed his shaking hands into his pocket and jerked his head.

"May I talk to you alone, sir?"

"Why, sure."

Captain Olcott looked faintly surprised but led the way to his quarters.

"Want to knock off flying for the day, Lieutenant?" he asked. "A brush like that, even as an accident, doesn't do a man's nerves any good."

"No," Clay said flatly, leaning back against the closed door. "Can you tell me anything about that kid—that sentry? Who is he? Where did he come from? How long has he been—"

Captain Olcott's eyes narrowed. "Now, see here, Lieutenant. I hope you're not thinking of starting a private vendetta against that poor idiot. Bad as it was, it was an accident."

Mike Clay shook his head, tight-lipped.

"It was no accident!"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"It was no accident," Mike Clay repeated grimly. "That was the fourth time in two months that someone has tried to murder me and make it look like an accident." He waved down the protest that came to the captain's lips. "I'm not talking nonsense. What happened to me isn't important—but it means that the whole strategy of the Air Force has failed."

He leaned hard, white-knuckled fists on the flight leader's desk.

"It means that the Nazis already know we're here, how we got here and what we're planning to do!"

CAPTAIN OLCOTT came around the desk, his eyes narrow.

"That calls for some definite explaining, Lieutenant."

"Look up my records," Clay said. "I'm as much in the dark about this as you are, sir, but here are the details. I was a newspaperman before I enlisted. Last fall my paper sent me to Berlin to get a special story. I'd been there before and knew the language and the set-up fairly well."

"I arrived in Berlin on a Tuesday, got a room, pulled some wires and got an afternoon appointment with von Rushig, Goering's right-hand butcher. When I went to keep the appointment, I accidentally opened the wrong door and walked in on a couple of Nazi big-shots, strangers to me. Anyhow, I apologized and backed out. There was no fuss, but when I went back to my hotel that night, a couple of Gestapo boys shoved guns in my back and told me I was under arrest."

"Interesting, Lieutenant," Captain Olcott said tightly, "but I don't see what bearing that has on—"

"You will," Mike Clay said. "The Gestapo wouldn't tell me what I was pinched for, and instead of taking me to jail they loaded me in a car and headed for open country. Clear of the city, they hauled out guns and informed me I was to die because my existence was dangerous to the Reich. It didn't make sense—but the guns did."

Clay shrugged. "Naturally, I objected to dying. So the two butchers did it for me, after some argument, and I got away with two Mauser slugs in me. I got back to America finally, figured it was all a grand mistake and forgot the matter—until a stranger broke into my room one night and started shooting. He almost, but not quite, got me."

"After that, they played it cagey. A wild car nearly ran me down once. A cornice stone fell off a thirty-story building and almost crowned me. I enlisted in the Air Corps and had my first solo trainer sabotaged. Later, I discovered my parachute cords cut."

Then the attempts stopped, and when I was shifted over here on the q.t., I thought I'd shaken them off. Until this happened."

Olcott took a nervous turn around the floor, scowling.

"It's the nuttiest yarn I ever heard," he said finally. "If I hadn't known you a while, I'd say you were cracked. Have you ever reported this to the proper authorities?"

"When it first started. Right after I got back I took it up with the F. B. I. and Army Intelligence but I think they wrote me off as a flutter-brain. It's so senseless. I've never been or seen or done anything important enough to make me a menace to Herr Hitler. But they seem to think I have, and in following me, they've followed the whole A.E.F. of the air right to the heart of its secret. Do you realize what I've done? I've Judased this whole Wing, without meaning to."

"But today was an accident. The officers saw it—"

"If I wanted to shoot somebody with a rifle," Mike Clay said grimly, "I think I could manage to hook the trigger on my button and look scared and sorry enough afterward to make it look good. I still say my name ought to be changed."

"Name changed?" Olcott stared blankly.

"Yeah," Mike Clay's eyes were bleak. "Changed from Mike Clay to Clay Pigeon—the Clay Pigeon of the A.E.F. Wait and see."

CAPTAIN OLCOTT stared out the window for a long silence. When he turned at last his face was strained.

"I don't know," he said wearily. "It's too crazy to believe and too significant and coincidental to overlook. Let me think about it and do some digging, Lieutenant. Keep this under your hat and go ahead as usual."

He walked around and laid a friendly hand on Clay's shoulder.

"Our flight goes up in ten minutes. We're tagging along with the Limeys for a look at the sector where two outfits washed out yesterday. This talk of a secret weapon has their wind up a little. Maybe we'll see some action."

"I hope so, sir."

"And Clay!" Olcott turned in the doorway. "Watch yourself—just in case."

CHAPTER II

Death in the Sky

TEN minutes later, Mike Clay slid the greenhouse of his Airacobra shut over his head, watching the flights of Spitfires and Hurricanes roar off and circle into formation above the drome. In the pit with the stick in his hand and the Allison burbling its rhythm of might at his back, Mike Clay lost his first nervous reaction and felt again the cold steadiness of nerves and muscles that had made him a top-notch flying cadet. He was not afraid of death, any more than any normal man fears death, but the first reaction to his narrow escape had been unnerving. Now, ready to go up and meet death face to face, he felt exhilarated, ready for anything.

In the point ship, Captain Olcott's hand dropped. The 'Cobra's prop dissolved in a blur of light. The sleek ship hiked up its slim tail and went arrowing across the tarmac and up in a superb, breath-taking climb. Warren and Nostrand, in Two and Three, shot after. Clay and his wing comrade, Billy Cleary, followed.

In the air, Clay's mirror showed him Engle and Playon shooting up to complete the V, with "Rocky" Whalen's ship, Number Eight, just moving out to climb up into the roving tail position. For the time being they would fly that way, flanked by a Hurry-box Squadron on the right and a Spitfire group on the left.

The patrol was to cross the Channel at twenty thousand and cut inland over a wooded section along the old French-Belgian border. It was across the path that two squadrons of fighter planes had passed the day before. And somewhere along this path that they had vanished completely.

For a time, Clay flew automatically, listening idly to the flow of talk brought to him by his inter-coms. The British had their wind up, all right.

The two flights had been small, it was true, but there was no reason for their complete disappearance. If engaged by a far superior Nazi air force, outnumbered so badly that destruction was inevitable, they should have at least wirelessly back the details.

But aside from some excited and meaningless shouts that had reached Control, there had been no further word from the flights. Talk of a new Nazi secret weapon, something of inconceivable killing power, was on the lips of the pilots.

Mike Clay carressed the trigger button on his stick and grinned faintly. Somehow, it seemed that under his thumbs lay the challenge to any secret weapon Herr Hitler could pull out of his hat. Like all the Yanks, he was only itching for a chance to touch those trips and pour America's answer to the challenge of dictatorship into a few black-crossed cockpits.

They crossed the Channel and headed inland. Presently the level land gave way to heavy forest. Studying the terrain, Clay was sure of one thing—either the Nazis were masters of camouflage or there were no hidden dromes down there to disgorge fighter planes. The big trees were everywhere. A forced landing there would be a crash landing every time.

Though they were deep in enemy territory, there had not been a sign of Nazi craft in the sky near them. A single flight, tentatively identified as Me-110s was seen several miles to the south, but it went out of sight. The very absence of ack-ack fire from below or interceptor planes above was grim evidence that something out of the ordinary was up. But what?

CLAY'S eyes were sweeping the ground below when he saw the brown patch. It was small and far away, looking like a small cigarette burn in a green carpet.

"Take a look toward the southeast, below," Clay said into his mike. "Isn't that wreckage or a spot where a flamer went into the trees?"

There was silence, then a sharp exclamation from Captain Olcott.

"You may be right, at that."

Clay heard him passing the information along to the British flight

leaders. Then, at a crisp command, the whole flight swerved aside, circling toward the brown spot below, but maintaining altitude.

From directly above, it was possible to verify Mike Clay's guess. The patch plainly showed the skeleton of burned fuselage and crumpled wings. There was no way of identifying the craft that had crashed and burned but the British were grimly certain it was a relic of the missing flights.

There was another interchange of discussion, then curt orders. The Spitfires and the American Airacobras would return to their course. The Hurricane squadron would drop down for a closer look at the wreckage, then stay at low altitude for a few miles in hopes of spotting other signs. A moment later Clay saw the Hurricanes peeling off, dropping down to reassemble at a scant five thousand.

He moved his own controls gently, following the rest back toward the original course. But he was looking back and down toward the Hurricanes as he flew and so he saw the incredible thing that happened then from its very start.

One moment there was only the forest of green, with the tiny crosses of the Hurricanes circling over the brown speck, dwindling behind. The next moment the air was full of Nazi planes!

They were coming up, appearing like magic out of the woods, shooting almost straight up at incredible speed, like bullets shot from a super cannon. And like the explosions of a big gun, each ship showed for a moment, as it appeared, a lance of reddish flame behind it.

Mike Clay yelled incoherently and wagged his arms. He heard sharp exclamations over the phones and knew the others were seeing the uncanny appearance. It was impossible—but the planes were coming straight, nose up, out of thick woods, coming up—up—up. Faster than any plane could possibly climb.

"Break formation!" The order came over the phones with explosive fury. "Scatter and fight!"

The 'Cobras and the Spitfires broke frantically, scattering in all directions. And not a moment too soon.

Impossibly, unbelievably, the Nazi ships had flashed up the intervening twenty thousand feet and were roaring among the Allied planes almost before the order could be given.

Hurling his 'Cobra aside, Clay caught a blurred glimpse of an orange-nosed Me-109 flash past him, halt for a long-drawn moment as though held by invisible strings then come diving back with guns spitting. Off to the west, a Nazi had crashed into the belly of a Spitfire that moved too slowly getting out of the way.

Locked together, the two ships were rolling over and over down the devil's drop of the sky, vomiting flame-tinted smoke. All around, the air seemed filled with roaring, darting Messerschmitts, Spitfires and Airacobras in an inextricable tangle.

IT WAS a blur that left Clay's senses behind, hopelessly outraced. But the instinct born of long training was faster than visual perception. Somehow, automatically, he was flashing back into the tangle, his thumbs sending the shiver of hammering recoil through the 'Cobra as he hurled lead at a diving Me.

In a sort of dull wonder he saw the converging streams of his own tracers march across the gray turtleback of the Me, saw the greenhouse cover dissolve. The Me went over and down in a screaming, uncontrolled dive from which there was no bail-out.

Then, Clay's mind, beginning to function coldly again, sorted a degree of order out of the chaos of impressions. He saw that the Spitfires and Airacobras were taking a beating. The Nazis had combined system with surprise. Hurtling up as they had from the impossible forest floor below, their very appearance had served to break formations and scatter opposing ships.

Then, recovering from the rocketing leap, the Nazi ships had paired off to leap on the scattered remnants of the flights with devastating effect. It was easy to visualize the fate of the two smaller, unsuspecting R.A.F. flights that had vanished over this area.

"Your tail, Clay!" roared the voice

of Billy Cleary in the phones. "Look out behind!"

Simultaneously, Clay felt the 'Cobra shiver to a rattling hail of lead. Balls of orange fire, like streams from some giant Roman candle, swept past him.

He squirmed around under the steel bow of the crash arch and looked back, kicking the 'Cobra aside and down as he moved. He caught a fleeting glimpse of an orange nose, riding almost on top of the Supercharger air intake cup. He could see red eyes winking at him from the leading edges of the wings and something *thunged* faintly against the pit cover over his head.

Clay swept the 'Cobra into a slashing, skidding dive and saw the tracer streams move away, then drift back. The Nazi behind him was no amateur. No matter what Clay did, the tracer streams were there beside him or above him, working inexorably closer.

Clay's twisting, turning, dodging flight was carrying him out of the center of the fight. To the west he saw two flammers going down, both Allied planes. Below, a single parachute drifted slowly while an Me darted around and around the tiny figure swinging beneath it.

In a red haze of fury, Clay saw thin fingers of tracer reach out and touch that swinging figure, thresh it around in the air and then vanish, leaving a twisted huddle below the chute. The sight of the Nazi machine-gunning a helpless victim drove some new desperation through Clay's veins.

Setting his stomach muscles against the terrible force, he hauled back on the stick. The 'Cobra came up and over in a screaming whirl that was half loop, half bank. The pilot in the Me made a frantic effort to match the maneuver, saw that he could not and tried a desperate peel-off. He succeeded only in placing himself broadside to the 'Cobra at the moment when Clay's eyes were clearing from their momentary blackout.

Clay saw the hazy shape of the enemy ship and let go with everything he had. Tracer streams missed the cockpit and slid back along the fuselage, punching a harmless channel. Alone, they might have missed

their purpose. But the electrically-goosed nose cannon came in on the refrain then with a shuddering *thump*.

A SHORT-FUSED frag shell, an inch and a half in diameter, split the converging path of the tracers and burst in the very heart of the Me's tail assembly. Clay saw a section of the rudder bearing the cranked cross fly off and drift away in slow motion. The tail wheel went spinning out and then the whole fuselage seemed to disintegrate.

His last glimpse of the ship showed the Nazi pilot standing up, clawing frantically at the side door of the greenhouse. Then ship and pilot were gone.

Clay spun the 'Cobra back toward the fight and saw that in the moments of his inattention the whole tenor of the scramble had changed. The Nazis had made two fatal errors. The first was in leaving the wreckage of an earlier victim to show in the forest. The second was in shooting their surprise bolt without regard to the detached Hurricane squadron wheeling far below the main flight.

Now, just as the Spitfires and Airacobras seemed close to annihilation, the Hurricanes had come smashing up from below to swing the balance. Mes were going down, now, or fighting desperately to break away from being boxed in.

Slamming back into the scramble, Clay saw Engle's 'Cobra twisting and turning, with two Nazis at his back. Grimly Clay drilled in and cut the path of the pursuers. He took some lead from one and sent the other limping away, leaving a smoke trail.

Suddenly Clay's 'Cobra shivered and rattled to a sharp burst of cupro. He kicked out of line, looking back for a sight of the enemy. But queerly there were no Mes on his tail. Off to one side, a Spitfire was hurtling up, joining a ragged formation. Clay's nerves tightened. That burst could have come accidentally, hosed from some nearby scramble—or it could have been deliberate.

"Reform at eighteen," came the cool, unruffled voice of Captain Olcott over the phones. "Back to base, everybody."

Clay started, realizing that in the moments of looking back for an enemy, the fight had ended. A ragged scatter of Mes were kiting it south and the survivors of the three allied flights were swinging into formation above. Clay looked at his watch, gaping. It seemed impossible that the whole mad tangle of battle had occupied less than ten minutes.

Of the eight 'Cobras that had gone up, only five remained. The Spitfire squadron was even more decimated, and two of the Hurricanes were gone.

Back at base, they turned their battered ships over to the ground crews. Clay saw with dull surprise that rows of holes had criss-crossed and weaved over the fuselage of his 'Cobra, coming once to within six inches of the pit before some hasty maneuver had thrown them back.

Clay took his mechanic aside.

"When you patch her up," he said, "save me all the slugs you dig out, will you?"

"Souvenirs?" the mech asked, grinning.

"Um-m-m, sort of." Clay let it go at that.

CHAPTER III

Still Pursued

WALKING across the tarmac toward the briefing room to turn in the record of his first combat, Clay's mind turned again to the mystery that dogged him. Why had he been marked for death? What had he seen or done that made his existence a menace to the Nazi purpose?

It was all so utterly senseless. Before the war he had not concerned himself with either politics or propaganda. He had been sent to Berlin to do human interest stories on leading Nazi figures. He had been careful to express no personal views on Nazi ideologies or methods, and to avoid contact with anyone under suspicion in Germany.

Yet twelve hours after his arrival in Berlin he had been a fugitive, marked for slaughter, while other

correspondents who had almost openly weighted their dispatches with anti-Nazi feeling, were at least tolerated for a time. Somehow, unwittingly, he had seen something or done something to merit the death sentence. But what?

Warren and Billy Cleary and Lou Engle were gone. Both Rocky Whalen and Captain Olcott had received minor wounds while three of the R.A.F. pilots had had to be lifted from their riddled pits. It was a silent, tense group that Clay joined as he entered the briefing room. Major Malcolmson, commanding the first contingent of U.S. pilots, was there with two British Intelligence officers, to hear the reports.

"They've done it, all right," one of the B.I. men said grimly, after listening to various versions of the encounter. "We've heard rumors for some time that the Nazis were working on a new type of rocket-driven catapult for land planes, but we always discounted the tales. Frankly, we couldn't quite see the value of the device." He added tight-lipped. "Now we do."

"Why stick such a device out there in the forest?" Captain Olcott asked. "Their planes couldn't land again anywhere near there. They must have to transport them by truck back to the catapults."

"Evidently," the B.I. man said, "As to the spot, it's a strategic one. That's right on the road our bombers have been taking for their jaunts through to the industrial regions. Those cat-driven planes would make cold meat of a bomber squadron and that would be worth any cost to Adolph. We may have to depend entirely on stratosphere planes for those hops in the future."

"How high do you estimate the planes were catapulted?" his companion asked, scribbling hasty notes.

"I'd say twenty thousand," Captain Olcott said, looking around, and the other nodded agreement. "We were around seventeen when they came up. They passed us and came back from the altitude advantage in dives. We don't know, of course, but what they were sent to that particular height to cope with us. Maybe

they could go higher."

"The problem," Major Malcolmson said soberly, "seems to be to develop a defense against those projectile tactics."

Mike Clay's mind had been working furiously as he listened, fitting what he heard into his own fragmentary pictures of the morning's battle. Now he spoke.

"May I suggest something, sir?"

"Wish you would, fellow," one of the B.I. men said.

"The rest of you check me if I'm wrong here," Clay said slowly, thinking his way as he spoke, "but it seemed to me that those Nazi crates came up to maximum and then hung there for a few seconds, cold, before they seemed to come to life and flash down to battle. None of them came up shooting and at least one or two rammed right into our planes. Am I right?"

CAPTAIN OLCOTT frowned.

"Quite, Lieutenant," he agreed. "But I don't see your point."

"Blackout. I believe those planes are hurled up so fast that the pilots go into a momentary blackout. They don't pull out of it until they've stalled at maximum. I imagine the men are specially picked and trained to withstand complete unconsciousness and to snap out of it fast, but I do think that for a few moments they're helpless."

"I believe you're right, Mike," Dan Nostrand said excitedly. "If we could be set right, they'd be cold meat for those moments while they're hung there, practically motionless and still blacked out."

"Right," Clay seconded. "That's what I was thinking. We could pick them off if we were set for them."

"Sounds logical," Major Malcolmson said. "But how would you go about it, Lieutenant?"

"With a decoy, sir," Clay told him, warming to his idea. "A small flight of bombers at the right height to draw them up and into the clear. The bombers would have to be flown by men who could swing them out of the way at the crucial moment and let the Mes come through. Then we'd be poised above, ready to drop down

and do our stuff."

He added grimly: "And while we were doing it, the bombers could drop down and fulfil their destinies on the catapult stands below. They're well-camouflaged, so the aimers would have to pick their spots by the flare of rockets as the fighters were shot up."

"Could be," the major said, a light in his eyes. "Good thinking, Lieutenant. We'll consider it and let you know."

The tired pilots began to disperse. Moving out, chatting with Nostrand and Dick Playon, Clay saw Captain Olcott gesture briefly. He drifted away and followed the flight leader to his quarters.

"You had something, Lieutenant," the captain said, dropping wearily into his chair. "We did some checking and the kid who shot at you turned out to be traveling under false colors. We had him enlisted as Jay Homan but he used to be an active Bundist under the name of Jacob Holzmann. Intelligence has taken him to London, so maybe your worries are over."

Clay shook his head. "He was only a tool. Every time before, the attempts have been made by a different person. Apparently it's a general order out to get me, with anybody handy sitting in the game."

"I'm having the rest double-checked—" Olcott began.

He was interrupted by the sounds of shouts and running feet outside. With a quick apology, Captain Olcott went to the door and talked briefly with a sentry. He returned after a moment, his face grim.

"As if war alone wasn't enough," he said bitterly, dropping his face into his hands. "One of the ground men, a mechanic named Anderson, was just found dead behind one of the dispersal points—murdered."

"Anderson!" Clay's nerves chilled. "That answers it. Anderson had my plane to check. During the scrap up there, I got a burst of slugs when only British planes were within range—"

Olcott's face was white. "You mean..."

"It looked as though attempt Num-

ber Six had failed," Clay said tautly. "I asked Anderson to dig out any slugs he could find, hoping to tell whether they'd come from an Me or a British plane. Apparently he found something and was killed before he could report it." His lips twisted in a humorless grin. "Clay Pigeon of the AEF."

"We've got to stop this," the captain said heavily. "Before the war, Britain and Germany were both open to visitors back and forth. We know the Nazis went in for Fifth Column preparation far ahead, so it's not inconceivable that they could have men planted even in the RAF. In this war, where individual scores aren't so important, a man could go into a dozen fights and put on a show of scrapping without getting called. I'm calling British Intelligence in on this, Lieutenant."

FOR three hours, Clay sat with members of the British Intelligence and with Major Malcolmson. He told and retold his story. Messages were exchanged with London and New York and Washington. The long conference finally ended. Mike Clay's story had been verified, but no solution showed.

"Until we can get some idea of what the beggars have against you, Lieutenant," one of the BI men said grimly, "there's nothing we can do but keep you under guard and dig for a break."

"You'll have to grow wings to keep me under guard," Clay said grimly. "There's a little matter of a Nazi death-trap to smash." He looked at Major Malcolmson. "Providing my idea is okayed."

"It has been, Lieutenant," the major said. "Captain Olcott's flight will convoy three light bombers, backed up by the Spitfire squadron. You'll go over tomorrow morning at dawn to try out your idea. Until then, be careful."

"I will," Clay promised, grinning. "I'd hate to have anything knock me out of that scrap, sir."

After evening mess, the survivors of the 'Cobra group gathered around Captain Olcott for a discussion of tactics to be employed on the morning

flight. Weather promised a low overhang which, if it materialized, would give the fighter groups perfect cover while waiting for the bombers to trip the trap.

If weather was wrong, they would have to depend on high flying and an out-of-the-sun approach. But either held plenty of danger and the promise of death.

"It won't be any picnic," the captain warned grimly. "I have a hunch the presence of American flyers and planes were what set things off yesterday. Some jughead probably figured on another complete wipe-out, to damage American morale. Those Nazis never learn. But at any rate, we'll be cutting it pretty fine with the best of breaks."

"Clay could be wrong in his guess, of course. If they don't black out, we'll be heading right into the teeth of trouble. If they guess our strategy, they may not bite at all, or may engage us with one group and then send up a reserve bunch to take the advantage."

"The other alternative," Clay said quietly, "is that our stunt works and we mop up a dangerous situation."

And on that note, the meeting broke up. Clay drifted away from the rest and went out onto the blacked-out drome. Scud covered the sky but through occasional rifts the moon slid through to pick out the dark block of headquarters, the barrack buildings, the canteen and the hangars. Dark figures moved silently.

Off to the south, searchlights jabbed white pencils into the sky, sliding back and forth in questing arcs. Occasionally Clay could see tiny sparks appear and then vanish among the light beams, and a dull rumbling reached his ears. Apparently the bandits were coming over and stirring up flak, but not in sufficient body to warrant a general alarm.

Clay's mind was back at his personal problem, worrying it and twisting it, digging for new light. Why was he a menace to the Nazi cause? What had he done in Berlin to deserve a death sentence?

Coldly, methodically, he went over his every move. He had not visited with anyone on the train into Berlin,

so the idea of having gossiped with a Gestapo suspect was out. None of his earlier writings had been anti-Nazi in tone. He carried no seditious literature or suspicious credentials.

IT ALL boiled down to the one spot where he might conceivably have aroused suspicion—his accidental opening of the wrong door on his way to meet von Rushig. He had started in, had seen two strange men at a desk, and had backed out at once with apologies. Only that and nothing more, but the more Clay thought of it the more that seemed to be the nub of his problem. Considering it, ideas began to buzz in his brain.

On impulse he turned and strode through the darkness to the big headquarters block. Captain Olcott was at his desk, deep in conversation with Major Malcolmson. They looked up, startled, as Clay entered.

"We were just discussing your problem," Captain Olcott said. "Nothing new has occurred, I hope."

"Nothing but an idea," Clay said grimly. "I've about decided that I couldn't possibly have said or done or written anything to warrant execution. The only other answer is that I saw something the Nazis didn't want me to see."

"But what, man?" the major demanded.

"A person. As I told you, I accidentally walked in on two strangers in conference. One wore a uniform, the other civies. If I could see pictures of all the known Nazi officials, I might spot one or the other of those two and get a lead from that."

"It's worth a try," the major said reflectively. "British Intelligence maintains as complete a file as possible. Let's see what we can dig up."

He drew over the telephone, placed a call and talked earnestly for several minutes.

"We'll take a ride, Lieutenant," he said, hanging up. "There's an Intelligence file at Hamsford we can use. There'll be a car here in a few minutes to rush us over."

Clay had to admit that the British were thorough. For two solid hours he leafed through photographs of high Nazis and low Nazis, in and out

of uniform, known spies and spy suspects. His spirits were beginning to droop when suddenly he saw a familiar face among the prints.

"That's the one," he said sharply. "The one in uniform who was talking to the civilian when I barged in. I'd know that wolfish, scar-red face anywhere."

One of the B.I. men took the print and studied the information carefully annotated on the back.

"Your idea may produce something," he admitted. "Kurt August Kammerer, a minor officer in the Nazi Intelligence. Though we've never actively crossed swords with him as we have with some of their top spymasters. It seems obvious that if your idea is at all sound, it's the man you saw with Kammerer who holds the key. Keep looking."

But the effort was doomed to failure. When the last photo had been studied and regretfully laid aside, Clay shook his head wearily.

"No soap. None of these I've seen even remotely resembled him. As I remember, he was stocky, blond, ruddy-complexioned, could have been a Britisher just as well as a German."

"I'll see if we can stir up any more pictures for tomorrow," the B.I. man said. "But I don't know. We could be entirely on the wrong track with all this."

CLAY suddenly felt a surge of excitement, the impression of being on a warm trail.

"I don't think so," he said. "Suppose that other man was being sent here as a spy, to pose as an Englishman. My seeing him in Berlin, closeted with a Nazi Intelligence officer, makes me a potential menace as long as I live."

"But good lord, man!" the Briton said. "We can't go around for a peek at the hundreds of thousands of blond, stocky men in England!"

"It won't be necessary," Clay said slowly, frowning. "An ordinary spy, planted in some squadron or regiment, wouldn't be important enough to warrant the lengths they've gone to to wipe me out. My man, whoever he is, must be planted well up in the inner circles."

In the car, riding back to the fighter base, Clay repeated: "He must be someone high up—maybe even a commanding officer."

"That's hard to imagine," Captain Olcott said. "This war's been going on so long that I can't quite conceive of any man really prominent getting by with espionage for long. A small man, tucked away in some remote corner—yes. But a staff officer, for example—he'd be so much in the eye of his mates and inferiors that he could hardly make an overt move without arousing suspicion."

"Suppose," Clay said, "that our man hadn't made any move—yet. Suppose he's planted for one purpose and only one. I saw my man in Berlin last year. Suppose he's done nothing since then but lay his plans for one master stroke at the moment the Nazis finally start their invasion push."

"Fantastic," Major Malcolmson said. "But possible—I guess. We'll think about it. Here we are."

CHAPTER IV

Mystery Visit

CLAY left the officers and started toward his own quarters. Then, on impulse, he swung aside and walked quietly toward the hangars. The sense of impending menace was strong on him; the feeling that somehow things were coming to a head, that the ring of death around him was inexorably tightening. If a spy knew that he was going up at dawn on a mission of danger, what better way to accomplish his finish than by sabotaging his plane?

In the shadow of the hangar, Clay was brought up short by the unyielding pressure of a rifle barrel. A hard-eyed sentry backed him against the brick wall of the building and flashed a hooded light.

"Lieutenant Clay," Clay identified himself. "My mechanic was killed this afternoon and I wanted to make sure my plane hadn't been tampered with. I'm going up at dawn."

"Lieutenant Clay?" The sentry's

voice was suddenly harsh. "Just a moment."

There was a rustle of movement in the dark, then a sharp, ear-splitting blast of a whistle.

"Hey," Clay said sharply. "What the—"

"Don't move," the sentry snapped, jabbing hard with the rifle. "Keep your hands up high. And be quiet."

There was a sharp, double click of the rifle being cocked. Clay trapped his lips and stood tensely quiet, his nerves cold. An officer of the guard ran up, followed by other guards.

"Corporal Olson reporting," the sentry said. "I think I've got a spy, sir. This man came up, claiming to be Lieutenant Clay."

"I am Lieutenant Clay!" Clay roared angrily. "What is this?"

"Sorry." The sentry's face was tight in the dim light of a blue flash. "Lieutenant Clay was here, not twenty minutes ago. He identified himself properly with credentials and asked to examine his plane for signs of sabotage. I accompanied him inside, watched him make a quick investigation, then let him out again. This is not the same man."

Clay's throat suddenly felt dry. His hunch had been right. Someone using forged credentials and giving his name had got at his plane. The new guards moved up, flanking him.

"For Pete's sake," Clay barked, "get Captain Olcott here! He'll identify me. The skunk who was here is the man we're after."

Captain Olcott arrived five minutes later, out of breath and worried. A sharp order and the guards relaxed sheepishly. Olcott's face tightened as he heard the story.

"Call out a ground crew," he barked. "Put a ring of guards around Lieutenant Clay's plane and keep them there until take-off. We'll have the ground men go over that ship with a fine-tooth comb. If anything's been tampered with, we'll find it."

By the time half a dozen ground men had swarmed over the Cobra from flipper tabs to nose gun, Clay was willing to admit that not even a stowaway fly could escape their search. But they found absolutely nothing. The repairs made following

the first scramble were sound and thorough. Every item was checked and double-checked and reluctantly okayed.

Clay and the captain followed every phase with eagle eyes. Guns were tested, the motor started and run up thoroughly, gun-sights and prestone and even the oxygen supply was checked. At last they were forced to the conclusion that Clay's plane was as safe and flyable as ever.

THEN what the devil was he after?" Clay growled, slamming a fist into his palm. "One 'Cobra is just like another. He certainly didn't go to all that danger and trouble just to look at my crate."

"I don't like it," Captain Olcott snapped, scowling. "For two cents I'd ground you tomorrow, Lieutenant. If we had a reserve ship, I'd have you take that, but our reserves haven't come up yet."

"I'm flying," Clay said grimly. "In this ship. The only chance of nailing whoever and whatever is behind this is to let me go on being the clay pigeon. It isn't just my life but the safety of the whole American Air Force at stake. If there's a ring strong enough to get at me this way, it's strong enough to sabotage the whole flying job we're here to do. It's got to be smashed."

"Good luck, Clay," Captain Olcott said, and his eyes were cold. "We go up at dawn. . . ."

In the cold light of dawn, Clay made a last futile check-up of his 'Cobra in hope of discovering signs of sabotage. He found nothing. The Allison ticked over sweetly, the Curtis constant-speed prop tugging eagerly at the morning air. Gas tanks were full, feed lines clear and all instruments registering.

Captain Olcott came up, like a waddling teddy bear in his high altitude suit, as Clay was finishing.

"The British are quite sold on your show, Lieutenant," he boomed above the bumble of the engine. "Major Sebold of Wing is going along with the Spitfire boys to have a look at the catapult layout as well as our plan for smashing it. Give him a good show. He's one of the British Brass

Hats on the staff that's coordinating the two air forces."

"What does he look like?" Clay asked sharply.

Captain Olcott grinned. "Forget him, Lieutenant. He flew in the other war and downed enough German crates to establish his patriotism for all time. He's been decorated twice in this scrimmage, before they shoved him up to a desk-flying job."

"Well," Clay grunted, "there's no law against suspecting."

"Out loud there is," the S.L. chuckled. "Here's the plot. We pick up the three light bombers over the coast and tag them across. We're getting our broken overcast, thank heaven, so we can stay behind and play tag. The bombers will drill over at eighteen thousand. We perch behind at twenty-three, ready to dive when the cat-planes come up.

"The Spitfires ride behind us, ready either to barge in on our scramble or take on any surprise reinforcements the Nazis might try to throw up. While we're mixing it, the bombers will go down and lay their eggs all over the catapult area."

A few minutes later the Airacobras were flashing across the tarmac and up into the gray dawn. Clay settled himself in the seat, thumbed up his landing gear and followed Olcott's plane in a sweeping circle over the base, climbing up to the assembly point. Back on the field, he could see the shadowy figures of ground men, officers and reserve pilots waving and wishing them silent luck.

Luck! Clay's lips curled without humor. He would need luck today. A spy had gained access to his plane last night by dangerous trickery, yet no reason for the trick could be found. But there must have been a reason. Clay was marked for death and whether they could find anything or not, the plane he was flying was to be his coffin. Of that he was sure.

SUDDENLY his phones, rattled. It was Captain Olcott's voice, sharp with tension.

"Clay," the leader barked without formality, "Control just reported. We know now what that devil was up to

in the hangar last night. Your plane is marked."

"Marked?" Clay grunted.

"There's a wide strip of bright orange paint under your tail assembly. He must have slapped it on with a wet brush last night, when the sentry wasn't looking. We didn't spot it because it's down where there aren't any vital controls to be checked. If you want to drop out—"

"I'm sticking," Clay growled.

"We'll cover your tail every moment," Olcott promised. "As the British say—carry on, old boy!"

They picked up the bombers near the white line of the Dover cliffs. Clay saw that they were new Bristol Beauforts, light and fast and maneuverable enough to hold their own in a scramble with fighter planes if the need arose.

There was a quick exchange of instructions in some code incomprehensible to Clay. Then the bombers lined out over the Channel and the fighters, with the 'Cobras in front and the Spitfires behind and to one side, went upstairs into the lower fringe of the overcast.

Top speed of the Beauforts was still a secret, but Clay was astounded at how little he had to throttle back to hold a position behind the heavily-laden birds of death. Certainly no better ships could have been picked for the dangerous job of setting off the Nazi death trap.

"Close up and climb to ordered ceiling," came Captain Olcott's voice.

The 'Cobras nestled up, climbing until the shreds of white cloud blanketed the dark earth below. From constant interchanges of cryptic signals, Clay judged that the bombers, flying in plain sight of the ground below the clouds, were doing the navigating for the entire fighter group.

His nerves were cold but steady. Yesterday he had been thrown into his first combat—"blooded," as the British called it—so unexpectedly that there had been no time to anticipate. Today he felt like a veteran, cold and calm and eager to see the cranked crosses of the enemy swimming in his sights, to feel the quiver of recoil as he thumbed the trips.

"Get set," came the crisp order, then. "Any moment, now . . . down we go!"

The barked words were like the spring that sets off the trigger of a cocked gun. Clay's nerves and muscles seemed to explode into action. Ahead, he saw Olcott's point ship wing over and go slicing down, shredding the misty clouds. Instinctively he kicked over and followed, shoving the throttle to the brass, conscious of Dick Playon's wing-tip holding a scant few feet to his left.

They roared down, burst out through the floor of the cloud and saw the whole panorama of death and violence sprawled below. The trick had apparently worked to perfection. The Nazis had either suspected nothing or were confident of their ability to cope with any situation.

The bombers were scattering, falling off from a central point in three direction. And through that widening hole, the Messerschmitts were hurtling at that uncanny, impossible speed.

"Pick your opponents and go to it," sang out Olcott's voice.

THE Mes were through the bombers, now, and faltering toward maximum ceiling. To Clay it seemed that some invisible, inexorable force was literally hurling the two squadrons at one another. The Airacobras, diving under full gun, were racing head-on toward the arrowing Mes, closing the distance at an impossible speed.

A climbing Nazi, his ship hanging almost vertical in the air, swam into Clay's sights, growing monstrously as the two ships rushed together. Clay squeezed the cannon trip and felt the *whump-whump* of recoil.

For a moment he thought he had missed. Then the Me, still hanging on its thundering prop, seemed to bulge and burst apart, filling the air with shreds and fragments. Both shells had burst inside the greenhouse, blowing the whole ship apart.

To right and left, other Mes were taking it, blowing apart or bursting into flames. It was a deadly, cold-meat slaughter. Diving down, the 'Cobras caught the Mes at a moment

when they were practically motionless in the air, broadside and helpless. Shooting them down was like knocking over ducks at a gallery. Five Mes went down at the first slashing burst. Of the four survivors, two fell out of the fight, wavering and limping.

Two alone seemed to have missed killing blows. They found themselves almost the center of furious, vengeful 'Cobras before their pilots could fully recover from the torturing effects of the climb.

Clay, sweeping past his own smashed target, dragged his 'Cobra up in a crushing loop that brought him into line below one of the frantically skidding Me survivors. He triggered a burst and missed. The other lines of tracers converged on the doomed plane. There was a burst of smoke and the quick blossom of a chute.

Below, the bombers were arching down, line astern. Clay saw them follow one another in darting dives. Then the forest bed below seemed to rise up toward them in a solid green balloon. For a moment the green was unbroken. Then suddenly it burst apart into gouts of earth, mingled with the black shreds of tree-trunks, timbers and other refuse.

"Attack formation!" came Captain Olcott's voice. "A heavy formation of fighter planes is sweeping in from the southeast!"

CHAPTER V

Double Pay-off

SWINGING his 'Cobra up into tight formation, Clay could see the gray specks of the Nazi planes rolling under the gray sky, hundreds of them. Probably the catapult crews below, seeing their trap sprung, had wirelessly for aid. And from the looks of the forest below, where the bombers were still curving and darting, that appeal must have been the last words any of those Nazis ever spoke.

There were cryptic code words that Clay guessed were instructions for the Spitfire group to stay hidden until

the crucial moment when their surprise appearance could be most effective. Forgotten was the personal menace that hung over Clay. His mind was a frozen surface, one that had trapped the instinctive reactions of battle and let every other thought or feeling skid off.

With his guns hot and his teeth peeled back, Clay dived into the head-on meeting with the enemy. There were perhaps fifty Mes, both 109s and the more deadly 110s, against five Airacobras. To the Nazis it must have looked like the opportunity of a lifetime to annihilate an enemy flight. They drilled in, forcing the 'Cobra group to scatter by the sheer weight of their numbers.

Clay found himself skidding aside from what looked like a massed wall of orange noses. Tracer streams licked at him and there were spasmodic, shuddering clatters like the sound of hail on a tin roof. But apparently none of the burst hit a vital spot, for the 'Cobra still maneuvered sweetly and lashed back with its own breed of fire.

Clay went up, and over the first line of the Nazi formation. He poured a burst into a segment of the second line. He saw the Nazi craft waver out of formation, smoking, but there was no time to see more. The air seemed full of tracer lines and black-crossed wings.

Then suddenly the whole enemy formation was breaking up, slipping and skidding wildly as the Spitfire squadron boiled down out of the clouds, pouring deflection bursts into pits and tails and motors. The scramble grew so wild that there was almost no opportunity of picking an enemy and sticking with him to the death. It was more a matter of darting and dodging to avoid collision, spurting at anything that showed in the sight rings.

Clay drove through an Me scramble and pulled into a tight roll that ended in a swift end-swapping. He hosed at an Me 110, saw the greenhouse burst, but had no chance to see whether or not he had scored a kill. At that moment lead rattled behind him, shaking the 'Cobra.

He pulled into a tight, diving turn

and looked back. There was no Me on his tail but a Spitfire was just zooming, riding a curve that could have carried it past him. Suddenly the whole picture of his own position swept back into Clay's mind, erasing the fever of the battle.

Keeping an eye on the darting Spitfire, he deliberately looped and rode back into the scramble, leaving himself beautifully exposed to a diving attack. For a moment he thought nothing would happen.

Then suddenly the Spitfire was dropping a wing, flashing down past an Me, leveling above and behind. Tracer licked out furtively and was gone, almost too swiftly to be seen. But the direction of those shots had been unmistakably toward the tail of Clay's plane.

"So that's it!" Clay said, through his teeth. "Now we're getting somewhere."

He set his muscles and yanked back on the stick. The 'Cobra screamed up and over in a punishing tight loop that left it on a level with the Spitfire and facing it, almost head-on.

GRIMLY Clay held his course until it seemed that the two ships would crash. Then, at the last possible moment, he winged up and shot past at the same moment the Spitfire pilot was making a frantic swing to avoid a crash. For a moment, the two cockpits were on a level and no more than a dozen yards apart.

And in that moment, Clay looked across and straight into the eyes of the stocky, ruddy-faced blond man he had last seen in the office of Kammerer of the Nazi Intelligence.

"So that was it," Clay thought in that fleeting instant. "My guess was right."

He saw the flash of alarm and hatred on the square face. Then the sight was gone as the two planes whipped apart. For a moment Clay wondered what to do. Now the phony British pilot would throw every effort into gunning him out of the sky.

But Clay could not fight back. If he did and shot down the Spitfire pilot, he might never be able to clear himself with the British authorities. Despite his position, he had no evi-

dence beyond his unsupported word that the other pilot was a spy. But more important, with the spy dead, there might be no way of uncovering the whole deadly ring he controlled and which might still remain to sabotage the Allied cause.

Suddenly Clay made up his mind. Overhead, the fight was easing off, with 'Cobras and Spitfires definitely taking the lead over the Nazis. Closer, the Spitfire was whirling back, and there was no mistaking the pilot's grim intent to kill.

Clay held his course, watching the Spitfire leap down. There was still enough scramble in the sky so that a short deflection burst, sufficient to smash him out of the sky, would pass unnoticed by other British and American pilots.

Fleeting, Clay thought of calling Captain Olcott and abandoned the idea instantly. He would tip his enemy and lay himself open to serious charges. After all, he could prove nothing.

Clay held his course. The Spitfire leaped closer, closer. He saw the tracer start. At the instant he threw the 'Cobra over and down as if in frantic last-minute maneuvering to avert doom. He heard the telltale rattle of cupro. Something punched at the bullet-proof glass, clanged at the cockpit armor. The 'Cobra shuddered and staggered. Clay tested the controls and found that miraculously they still responded.

Still he held the 'Cobra in a fluttering, gliding fall that was carrying him down and away from the fight above. The Spitfire danced around and came back, too eager for the kill to care about betrayal now. Clay steepened his dive, pancaked, and then fell off again.

The maneuver served to demonstrate that he was out of control and, at the same time, it threw him out of line. The Spitfire hung back, curving above as the pilot studied his victim. To the rest, it would seem that a gallant Britisher was riding herd over an injured ally.

They were drawing further and further away from the rest, working back toward the coast, toward England. Clay's altimeter needle was

down to ten thousand, to nine, to seven.

At five thousand he made his play. The Spitfire skidded past, dangerously close, with the ruddy-faced pilot squinting to see the extent of damage done. Clay slumped forward until the other ship was past, then straightened with a snap. The 'Cobra's prop screamed with added revs as he shoved the throttle ahead. The lithe ship fairly leaped up and onto the tail of the Spitfire in a vital position.

Grimly Clay thumbed the trip. A tracer stream squirted past the Spitfire's pit, less than two feet from the fuselage. Clay saw the helmeted head jerk around, saw the Spitfire slide off wildly to avoid the sudden menace.

COLD-EYED and steady, Clay ruddered and sent another burst hosing at the other side of the Spitfire. The pilot straightened frantically and tried to dodge.

But the Yank pilot was in the commanding position and he held it grimly. Wherever the Spitfire turned and twisted, the 'Cobra was there with a warning burst. There was no defense and no escape.

A dozen times Clay could have poured death into the ship ahead, but each time he held back, aiming just to one side or the other. Twice the Spitfire pilot tried desperately to catch his opponent napping and swing free. But each time the quick scramble ended with Clay still on top, herding his captive homeward.

The Channel appeared below, crawled beneath their wings and dropped astern. Inland, the camouflaged drome appeared. Clay fired a warning blast. Then, when the other pilot's head turned, he gestured for landing. The Spitfire pilot nodded and cut his motor.

Clay was out and racing forward, pistol in hand, as the stocky blond man scrambled out of his own pit. Groundmen and officers were running up.

"Arrest this maniac!" the blond man squawled furiously, pointing at Clay. "He's either insane or a traitor. Instead of fighting the Nazis, he picked on me, hosed me up good and then herded me home like a cow.

A dozen armed men jumped to surround Clay. His pistol was jerked from his hand.

"We'll take care of him, Major Sebold," a British defense captain snapped. "Come along, you!"

"Just a minute." Clay looked up at the sound of planes drawing near. "Wait until the flight lands before you pass judgment."

"I insist that you march this—this lunatic—" the ruddy-faced man began furiously.

But the appearance of the 'Cobra squadron dropping down choked off his words.

Captain Olcott was the first man out of his ship. He came running up, tugging at his own pistol, with the other pilots behind.

"Did you get him, Lieutenant?" he panted sharply.

A dozen voices started to inform the captain that Clay was the prisoner on serious charges.

"It won't wash," Olcott barked. "It happens that I was riding herd on Lieutenant Clay, ever since we discovered that his ship had been marked. I saw a Spitfire cross his tail and give him two bursts. I tried to warn the lieutenant but his radio was apparently dead. Anyhow, before I could swing around, Lieutenant Clay took things into his own hands and seemed to have carried them rather well. I demand the immediate arrest and investigation of this man who claims to be Major Sebold of the R.A.F."

There was a lot of clamor and confusion but Captain Olcott, backed by the bull voice of Major Malcolmson, pushed his point. Clay and the raging Sebold were both locked up, pending investigation.

The British have a reputation for being slow, thick and bumbling. But they disproved that beautifully. Clay and his enemy were locked up at ten-ten in the morning. Shortly after noon, guards came and marched Major Sebold away. Two hours later, Clay was released.

YOU did it, boy," Captain Olcott chortled.

He started a full-arm slap at Clay's back and pulled it up short, remem-

bering the presence of Major Malcolmson.

"Go ahead," the major said, his eyes twinkling. "If you don't, I will. The Intelligence boys have broken up the whole plot, thanks to the lieutenant. Major Sebold was quietly killed and this man, who resembled him astoundingly, was put in his place two months ago to lay the groundwork for an invasion smash. When he saw the jig was up, he told the whole story and helped Intelligence round up the ring."

"He was the man you saw in Berlin, all right," Captain Olcott said. "He was getting his final rehearsal there before being smuggled to England. If you hadn't blundered in the wrong

door that day, England's most vital defense secrets might have been laid bare for the enemy. Now the plot is smashed and also, thanks to you, we've handled that catapult base beautifully. The bombers report the whole set-up blasted to kindling."

Clay drew in a deep breath of clean, cool air and grinned.

"What I want to know," he said, "is when we go up again. I got cheated out of three-quarters of that scramble back there and I'm itching for action."

One of the British Intelligence men, hovering in the background, looked at his companion with dazed eyes.

"These Yanks," he said weakly. "Him—he's itching for action!"



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With a grin Pick Yancey settled down to his own grenade throwing

BOMB TRAP

By WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

High above the Philippine jungles, Yancey and Carhart stage a death rehearsal of the Civil War—with Japs as props!

IT WAS a tough assignment. The Philippine bridgehead for the landing of Jap supplies from the southern tip of Formosa, two hundred miles into the north, was the target. Knowing its importance, the American command in the Far East had ordered it smashed at until made useless.

For their part, the Japs had moved in scores of archie pieces and criss-crossed archie trajectories at various altitudes, until it was all but impossible for any effective bombing at high altitude. And to bomb this position at low altitudes was sheer suicide.

But a tough crew in the U. S. Navy's

air arm was now working on that very problem. Friction between pilot and bombardier, however, threatened to spoil the show.

"Hold 'er still, pal!" "Slug" Carhart, the bombardier, snapped into his phone. "How can I bomb if you let the ship jitter all over the sky?"

"Pick" Yancey's reply was dangerously smooth.

"Maybe you got somethin' there, brother! Maybe you can't! Looks like we've been flying over this beach long enough for the average bomber to score a direct hit once in ten!"

"Why, you—"

"Enemy aircraft coming!" "Sunny" Darville, the third man on the team, blared into his phone. "Better hold off the bombing, you two, until we clear these two Japs off our tails!"

The rearmost man in the three-place Devastator swiveled his turret guns and coolly got ready for the two Kamikaze monoplanes that were angling in for a blast. Sunny was grimly amused to find he was actually relieved that some diversion had interrupted the growing feud between Slug Carhart and Pick Yancey.

Pick lifted his eyes to the rear-view glass. For a moment the truculent stares of pilot and bombardier locked. Then Pick was whirling in a fast chandelle and coming out of it with his wing guns blazing.

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat—

One of the Japs veered off in a split-S, while the other Jap hurdled the Yank plane and reached for altitude with an Immelmann. Sunny Darville came into action with his turret guns. He yelped his glee when a Jap wing broke under the leaden stitching the U. S. Navy gunner gave it. The Kamikaze flew apart in mid-air.

Archie fire, which had left off to give the Japs a crack at the Navy plane, now opened up again with a murderous fire. The second Jap had veered off, was lurking a few miles away hopefully, looking for help before he tackled the hard-bitten Navy dive bomber again.

"Lay yo' eggs," Pick crisped to Slug over the phone. "The wind has shifted. Ah've got to dig for our rendezvous with the Sussex now! The gas is low."

"Huh?" Slug blared. "Listen, I got to get lined up again!"

"No time for that," Pick said flatly. "Ah'm boss, mister. Lay yo' eggs. You fused them, didn't you? Well, we ain't gonna land with 'em!"

"You're boss when I'm not bombing," Slug said heatedly.

"Which is now. Ah'm boss, because I'm pilotin'. Lay yo' eggs, suh!"

Slug released his bombs aimlessly, his eyes bitter. As the plane hit east for the rendezvous, picking up needed speed for the run as the bombs fell free, Sunny Darville frowned his worry.

"Trouble ahead," he thought, "and plenty of it. And not all for the Japs. Unless I'm nuts, my fire-eating South Carolina pilot and my frank-talking Indiana bombardier will take up the Civil War where Grant and Lee left off!"

CAPTAIN ALFRED JANES, commander of the aircraft carrier *Sussex*, looked thoughtfully at the chart spread on the table of the Operations room. He tugged at his chin, eyeing the strip of land that was the Jap beachhead.

"Of course, it's out of the question for us to get down at low altitude and wreck this supply depot of theirs. There's no earthly way we could, without losing valuable planes, and we haven't enough as it is. No, Mapley—we'll have to stay high and try to do the job with our bomb-sights." He smiled slightly. "You get the idea?"

Commander Harold Mapley nodded.

"Yes, sir. Peck away at that spot so as to keep their men and guns busy. While the Army mines the forward positions the Japs will move across. Then—" He gestured, his gray eyes hard. "Blooney the Japs!"

"Right." Captain Janes liked a man who minced no words. "We must act as if our very lives depended on that beachhead. Actually, we want them to land every man and every pound of stuff they can. When those land mines blow up and our men go into action, we'll recapture the Philippines from the yellow little runts!"

Commander Mapley grinned.

"I've got a pretty tough bunch working over that objective. If they

ever find out I'm really not expecting them to wreck that beachhead, those youngsters will raise Cain."

Janes looked interested.

"Yancey and Carhart, eh? Those two look good to me. But—" He paused, frowning. "Funny, but I've got a sneaking notion those two are good individually, but not so hot as a team. How about it?"

"They'll spark," Mapley assured his superior. "Believe me, they're a trio of wildcats."

Ten minutes later, Commander Mapley was glowering severely at his crew.

"What is the Navy coming to?" he barked. "I told you I wanted that beach blown to smithereens!"

Slug Carhart stirred.

"Got any ideas on how a ship can be held still so a bombardier can do his work?" The man's hard eyes shifted to Pick Yancey.

"Maybe some practice, somewhere?"

Pick Yancey flushed angrily.

"Commander Mapley, suh!" he protested. "Ah would like to know if you have any ideas on how long a man is expected to hold a plane still against murderous archie fire. Maybe if we jettisoned some bombs out of the cargo and put in a few more gas tanks, maybe Ah could stall long enough for my bombardier to make up his mind on the target!"

Mapley opened his mouth to say something. And shut it again. Mapley didn't like signs of friction among crew members. But if it helped to focus this particular crew's interest on the target, it was all right with him.

"You have my orders, Yancey. You are not to lose your Devastator. Not under any excuse you can think up! That equipment is too valuable to set up for the Japs to knock down! Understand? Good! But—I want you to pound that beachhead until a fox would break his leg trying to cross it!"

"Yes, suh!"

"Right, sir!" Southern drawl and Indiana twang merged and clashed. The trio saluted smartly and withdrew.

Outside Slug Carhart grimaced disgustedly.

"Heck, if only I could fly my own plane! I'd see those bombs were planted, believe you me."

"Ah reckon we'll have to believe you—since you don't seem able to prove anything otherwise," Pick Yancey snorted. "Now, if Ah could only handle the bombin', as well as all the flyin'—"

Sunny Darville broke it up.

"Hey! Look at what is coming in!" he exclaimed.

A Devastator, so badly shot up that it fairly staggered in to a landing, was wobbling astern the carrier, its pilot fighting the sluggish plane into position for the set-down.

One wing was shattered badly. The hatches had been shot away. Of the lowered landing gear, only one wheel remained. The fuselage was riddled from stem to stern.

THE three of them watched, breathless, as the game pilot made his try, judged it beautifully, slid down on his one good wheel and contacted the arrestor hooks. The plane canted slightly as it slid along the deck, but a throttle blast leveled it again. Then the hooks had it, were slowing it, had stopped it. The damaged plane's deck crew raced anxiously to take over.

The pilot was haggard from loss of blood. A bullet streak furrowed his neck redly. The gunner-radioman swayed weakly in his pit, then collapsed into the arms of the crewmen.

"Look! The bombardier's office!" Slug Carhart said grimly.

From under the fuselage dangled something that they made out to be a human arm. Or what was left of it. So savagely had archie fire torn the bombardier's working space, the crewmen were able to reach in and tenderly remove the lifeless body.

"Looks like that lad held real still," Pick said. "I'd say maybe two shells hit through to him." His eyes touched over his own bombardier. "You'd like somethin' like that?"

"I'd like to carry out my orders," Slug snapped.

A flush stained Pick's cheeks.

"Ah'd admire to help you, suh. But Ah've got orders, too. If Ah could hold the ship steady against the

buckin' when the archies explode. But Ah still have orders to save my ship! If only Ah could figure out some way to bring her in real low, so you'd have an easier time with yo' sights."

"Why, darn your eyes!" Slug blared. "You mean I'm not good enough to work my bomb-sight? If I had a pilot with nerve enough to fly me where I want, when I want, despite shells, Japs or high winds, I'd show you some bombing!"

"Break it up," Sunny said nervously. "People are staring at us. Crewmen, pilots, deck officers. We're fighting Japs, you guys, not one another!"

They broke it up. But there was a thoughtful look on Pick Yancey's face when he watched the hangar crew trundle the crippled ship to the power elevators, for the trip down to the repair quarters.

"Ah wouldn't say that plane was worth much, would you?" he drawled to Sunny. But his eyes were watching Slug out of the corners. "Ah would say a crate like that could maybe be spared for—well, for a trip it might not come back from! Stripped of its bomb-sight, and other valuable equipment. What do you think, Sunny?"

Slug Carhart was not waiting to hear what Sunny Darville thought.

"I think you haven't got the nerve," he said harshly. "How do you like that, pal?"

For once Pick didn't answer. Instead, he crossed to the senior deck officer.

"Suh?" he addressed Lieutenant-Commander Miller. "Ah wonder if Ah could speak with you about that plane. You see, suh, we have very important orders for a certain mission. And we have orders not to wreck our plane. Now, that plane strikes me as bein' already wrecked. If you got my meanin', suh."

Miller got it, with eyes that widened in surprise.

"Let's hear the rest of it, mister."

Slug and Sunny heard it, too. Sunny was patently awed. But Slug was grimly amused, his eyes studying Pick ever and again, as if to find where the joker was. He was still trying to find the joker when Miller gave his answer.

"I'll see if Captain Janes wishes to survey the equipment out—to the Japs," he said dryly. "I'll let you know."

But as the deck officer left, his eyes were round with astonishment. It isn't every day that you hear a man pleasantly asking to be sent to his sure death.

COMMANDER HAROLD MAPLEY glanced at his wrist-watch in irritation.

"What is that, Miller? Of course! Any plans Carhart and Yancey may have for accomplishing their mission are all right! What the devil sort of question is that, mister?"

But Lieutenant-Commander Miller wanted to be certain. There might be questions, later. He did not intend that anybody would forget.

"Very good, sir. Now, about Morrison's flight—that N-Twenty plane. It just came in, shot to pieces. It would need a major overhaul, sir, and I think it best to—"

Mapley was on his feet, his face flushed with annoyance.

"You are to do as you think best, and not to bother me with it. Don't worry about my opinion, mister. Must I be plagued with every small detail of what goes on aboard this ship?"

"No, sir," Miller said mildly. "Then I may take it that any disposition I make of N-Twenty is my responsibility? And that any help I give Carhart and Yancey in carrying out a mission is your responsibility?"

Mapley shook his head at thought of the dozen things he had yet to do. Being executive officer aboard a warship the size and the importance of the *Sussex* is not a sinecure. Especially with a skipper like Captain Janes. And yet you still had to take time out to listen to the plaintive murmurs of junior officers!

"I believe you understand me, mister," Mapley said, his mind and his eyes already busy with other things. "That will be all."

"Thank you, sir," Miller saluted, did a neat about-face and marched out of his senior's cabin.

* * * * *

He saluted again when Pick Yancey and Slug Carhart climbed up into the

hastily patched-up wreck that had come in several hours earlier. He saluted because he liked them, respected what they were doing—and because he knew the chances were strong he'd never again salute them.

He eyed the carefully cleared deck of the aircraft carrier.

"Snap into it, fellows! I'm with you in not advertising this stunt to anybody. Not even to those on this ship. If you are to succeed in this—er—mission, there must be no foreknowledge. But—I can't keep the landing deck cleared for long!"

"Yes, suh," Pick said, with a half smile.

"Don't say 'good-by' too quick, sir," Slug added grimly. "I still have a hunch we don't take off! Lord, this is too good to be true! Imagine coming back and not hearing somebody say:

"'What? You didn't bomb that beachhead out of existence!'"

Miller coughed.

"Imagine coming back!" he said under his breath.

Sunny Darville had climbed up to his seat. Now he stared at his crewmates, puzzled.

"Hey! How in heck am I to ride with all this junk you have in here? What is this stuff, anyway?"

"Forgot to tell you, fella—but you ain't booked for this trip," Pick Yancey drawled.

He glanced up from a scrutiny of the erstwhile instrument board. Everything of any value had been removed.

"Be seein' ya, friend," Pick grinned.

"Nuts!" Sunny raged. "I'm part of this crew!"

"For Pete's sake, chop it short, Sunny!" Slug warned. "Look—we don't need a radioman-gunner-observer for a crate that doesn't plan to gun, nor observe, nor radio, do we? Besides, your seat is needed for more bombs." He stared at Pick. "What are those bags, anyway? I mean, they're tied up. How do we bomb with them?"

"I'll explain later, suh," Pick said, stiffly formal. "Ready?" he yelped to Lieutenant-commander Miller.

He whirled the starting gear alive, relaxed visibly at the roar of the powerful motor.

"Thank you, suh!" He saluted Miller carelessly. "Want to step down, Mistuh Carhart?" he added with a taunting grin.

"Get going!" Slug howled. "What is this, a Southern Coffee Club? Let's scram!"

The ship left the deck with a blasting roar and headed instantly for the northwest stretches of the Pacific—and the tip end of Luzon.

AT PRECISELY the same moment the plane bucked from the archie barrage at Luzon's eastern edge, Commander Harold Mapley was making a routine inspection aboard the *Sussex*.

"Ah, Miller! Hope you settled all those little details you saw me about? Good! Very good!"

The executive officer trod the decks of his ship a few paces further, then stopped when his eyes discerned the disconsolate figure of one Sunny Darville.

"I thought you were out on that mission, Darville!"

"The only thing I'm out on is luck, sir," Sunny muttered. "I'm clean out of that." He shrugged unhappily. "They were a good pair, sir. If only they had straightened out their squabbles."

Mapley stared at Miller, then at Sunny again.

"Would I be inquisitive if I asked you to explain just what it is you are saying? *Who* were a good pair? *What* squabbles would they have straightened out? *Why* are you out of luck, young man?"

"Slug and Pick, sir," Sunny said. "Their bickering. And—I was left out of their 'suicide flight', so they'd have more room for explosives." He sighed. "They'll get their objective this time, sir. And probably Navy crosses and Congressional medals, to boot! Heck!"

Mapley's features had congealed in horror. Now they broke and swam in a half-dozen directions at once.

"Miller!" he blared, forgetting his naval etiquette. "Miller!" He gripped his junior's arm and shook it. "*What's happened?*"

Miller blinked nervously.

"At your express orders, sir, I assisted Carhart and Yancey in arrange-

ments to carry out their mission. Also—at your orders, sir—I made disposition of N-Twenty. Carhart and Yancey are in N-Twenty, sir—with a super-load of explosives. I—I don't fancy we shall be hearing from them again, sir. Not directly, that is." Mapley, his face drawn, signaled Miller to follow him. For once the executive officer was shaken to the depths.

Captain Janes listened, his eyes wide with astonishment.

"My God, Mapley! Of course, I told you to let them think it was our single purpose to wipe out that beachhead! But—confound it, man—I thought you would use some discretion!"

Mapley promised Miller some fun.

"Later!" his glare told the junior officer. Then aloud: "Anything we can do now, sir?" he asked Janes practically.

Captain Janes considered, then wrote a message hurriedly.

"Code that, and radio it to the American attacking force on Luzon. Yes, yes—the Japs will decode it! But who the devil cares what they do an hour from now? We've got to let our forces know!"

"Give them the story, and the approximate time you think those—those darned fool youngsters will be over the beachhead. They won't die in vain!"

* * * * *

Pick Yancey banked sharply, lost some altitude in a fast slip, and then slammed on for the northwest tip of the island of Luzon. He spoke into the mouthpiece strapped to his chest.

"If you want, Slug, shed a few eggs on anythin' you see. Er—Ah mean, Ah don't think you'll have much chance after the next ten minutes."

"Or ever again after that, eh?" Slug Carhart asked calmly. "No, pal—I am satisfied to ride it down. Any way at all, so long as it gets there. But—what about this junk in Sunny's pit?"

"Oh, that!" Pick said. "Ah thought we'd like to strap some bags of grenades on, as we parachute down. They ain't fused until we fuse 'em, see? No fear of their goin' off, when the chutes open." He chuckled. "But it'll give us somethin' to pitch with, as we sail down on those danged Japs!"

Slug grinned, then chuckled back.

"Nice idea, pal. By gum, I didn't think of that myself!"

HE WENT back carefully, got the bags of grenades, passed one of them up to Pick's seat. The other bag he adjusted himself, about his waist. He touched the ripcord ring of his chute, nodded his satisfaction that all was in readiness.

For the next five minutes, they rode hard for the beachhead. As they were raising it, a flight of fast planes showed in the distance, to the south.

"Looks like Wildcats," Pick said flatly. "Navy fighters. And Airacobras, of the Army, with 'em. But we ain't got the time to inquire."

He lost altitude rapidly, the nose of the plane hard down and the throttle cracked. The Devastator whistled faster and faster. The archie puffs that now bloomed up around the plane didn't more than rock it gently in its speeding plunge toward the target.

"Hey, Pick!" Slug said. "While I still think of it, I—" He paused, his eyes embarrassed. "Well, what I mean is, I take back all I said. Anyway, I think the Southerners are pretty good fighters. Some of them. My grandpappy said they were, and I guess he ought to know!"

He laughed a little uncertainly.

"Oh, heck! I'm sorry I sounded off, Pick. But I was afraid that a good pilot like you wouldn't want to have anything to do with a bum bombardier!"

Pick grinned back as he nosed the ship faster.

"And Ah thought you figured like you said, that Ah was just naturally a rotten pilot." He was silent a moment. "Maybe we could of been a good team, Slug!"

Pick yelled his mirth.

"Boy, maybe yo' grandpappy is a-lookin' down and thinkin': 'What in thunder is that boy shootin' at Japs for, when he has him a Johnny Reb dead to rights in that front pit!'" He sobered. "Ah wonder if they met—our two grandpappies—at Gettysburg?"

Slug shouted his astonishment.

"Hey! You never told me your grandfather was at Gettysburg!"

Pick grinned with pardonable pride.

"Ah thought perhaps you might of read about it, friend. Or maybe yo' grandpappy told you. That's where Ah get my name, suh. Pickett. Pickett's Charge. Ever hear about that?"

"That's where my grandpop lost his leg!" Slug exclaimed. "In Pickett's Charge! The craziest, bravest, wildest infantry charge in history! And they danged near made it, too. That charge would have won the Civil War!"

"The *what* war?" came back the cold inquiry.

Slug grinned.

"The 'War Between the States'," he amended. And chuckled loudly.

Both ends of the phones rang with laughter.

THE Japs around the ammunition dump stared with anxious eyes at the sky, as the dive bomber's roar came to them above the pound of their own anti-aircraft. The Yank artillery was picking up also, was for some reason concentrating a blasting attack on a column of tanks—the Jap column that was so cunningly disguised with palm fronds and other greenery.

"They cannot know," one Nipponese officer said worriedly. "But—that noise! That airplane! It comes this way!"

"No plane can live through our anti-aircraft fire," another replied with contemptuous disdain. "It will be shot down, surely. And the men in it will die!"

"Of what benefit," wailed the first, "if it falls on us!"

"It—it cannot." But there was doubt in the answer, now. "No, it cannot, I assure you. You see—*Ai-ee!*"

The wail of despair came when the U. S. Navy dive bomber broke the cover of the horizon ahead, pursued by a swarm of Japanese attack planes. And off to the right coursed an angry group of fast Navy fighters.

"*Ai-ee! Ai-ee!*"

Japs broke from the ammunition dump and ran madly, despite the intensified Yank artillery fire. It was a drum barrage that was eating its way slowly along the jungle paths, ever nearer the camouflaged tank column and the all-important dump.

"Boy, lookee there!" Pick Yancey howled, his eyes keen on the running

Japs. "A tank column, camouflaged, by God! Boy, maybe Captain Janes didn't know what he was talkin' about when he sent us to clean out this nest!"

"Stop debating and let 'em have it!" Slug laughed. "But gimme some room to get my feet clear when I pull the ripcord! Lord, you're so close to the ground, I'll stub my toe on a tank!"

"Had to get there," Pick apologized. "Hang on, pal! Ah'm zoomin' for altitude!"

The Devastator all but shed its wings when Pick leaned back on the stick and reached for the sky. The plane shuddered, then plunged upward. Pick, his eyes fixed on the earth, yelled with the excitement.

"Ah'm goin' to peel her off right near where all those Japs are—~~were~~—standin'! See? Maybe that's important, that spot! Ah'll peel her off, and before she starts down, Slug—jump for it. And remember yo' grenades! For gosh sake, don't land with any of 'em left!"

"Okay, Skipper!" Slug shouted back. "And—happy hunting, guy!"

Pick moved, and the plane veered on a wing, canted there as if the laws of gravity had been suspended. From the rear pit a figure shot out, legs and arms pinwheeling until the chute-cloth snapped wide. Another such form shot from the front hatch.

Slug started throwing his grenades as fast as he could grab them from the bag strapped to his middle, fuse them and let them go. But Pick held back, staring with startled eyes at the swarm of Navy attack ships that were slanting in, tracer streaking from their wings. Then, with a grin of hope that he had denied himself a moment before, Pick Yancey settled down to his own individual bombing.

The Devastator, loaded with its terrific bomb cargo, shot by the parachuting airmen like an express train. It seemed to merge with the ground, at a spot where a short time before a horde of Jap soldiers had milled. Then all creation seemed to bucket upward in a belching, flaming wall.

The Navy airmen were slammed aside by the hot breath of the explosion, were lifted hundreds of feet, and then they were dropping again. But

under them now, instead of the camouflaged tanks, was a line of flaming junk.

Pick shed his remaining grenades hurriedly, when he saw the column of tanks detonating fuel tanks and explosives under the impact of that first sundering blast. Little yellow men scattered frantically, to drop in smoking bundles of clothing.

The U. S. Navy fighting planes were streaking lower and lower now, were adding their own detonation bombs to the uproar of confusion that had taken hold of the erstwhile Jap advance. Artillery fire, suspended to let the parachuting figures of Pick Yancey and Slug Carhart slip safely earthward, waited a painful lull, then blasted ahead with savage rapidity.

FROM the cover of the palms, perhaps a mile away, lurched the hidden Yank tanks, gouging a way through the forest and down into the nightmare that had succeeded the orderly Jap alignment. Navy planes flew close over them, spearing down with flaming wing guns to prevent any ground troops from recovering for a defense, no matter how futile.

The beachhead was isolated behind the yawning chasm that the exploded ammunition dump had dug. Not for a long time would invading Jap troops beach their boats and supply ships on that particular corner of Luzon. And the time was coming when they would be driven back to their own miserable homeland.

* * * * *

Pick Yancey, recovered from the shock of his fall after his chute had collapsed against a tall palm, got gingerly to his feet and reached out his automatic. Carefully, he ducked from tree to tree, and all the time his voice shouted: "Slug! Ah say, Slug, can you hear me! Slug!"

A flat, smacking explosion went off almost in Pick's ear. A Jap sharpshooter plunged from an adjacent palm tree. Slug's dry Indiana twang sang out. "Take it easy, pal! Sure I could hear you. So could that Jap! I was drawing a bead on him, so I couldn't answer!"

Slug showed, his smoking automatic in his hand. He oriented himself with

a glance at the spots of sky that broke between the tropic forest.

"Get going, Johnny Reb," he snapped. "Come on, Pick, for Lord's sake! Maybe we'll make it away! Somehow, we seem to have landed right in the path of an Army attack!"

"Started it, maybe," Pick guessed, as he followed after Slug. "Maybe they were just waitin' for us to blast that ammunition dump, and then they attacked. Lucky, huh?"

"Looks like more'n luck to me," Slug grunted. "Hey!"

Slug dropped when a small, speedy tank raced close, spun on swift treads. Pick dropped with him, but came to his feet when the turret of the tank swung up. His gun was trained carefully on the head that emerged.

"Don't shoot, Navy! Hold your fire! And climb in here! This is friends, pal!" And all of it in very good American! "Hop to it!"

Pick and Slug gaped, then raced for the turret and scrambled aboard. The soldier in charge stared at them with wide eyes, and shook his head.

"Darned if I didn't think I was crazy, joinin' up with the tanks," he said. "But darned if the Navy Air ain't crazier!"

"This is a crazy war," Slug grinned. "Don't get your wind up because nothing makes much sense."

The Yank continued to shake his head as the tank whipped along toward the rear, past the advancing American column.

"Our Headquarters got word you two guys mistook a feinted maneuver for the real thing," he finally explained. "Anyway, you boys did a heap of damage!"

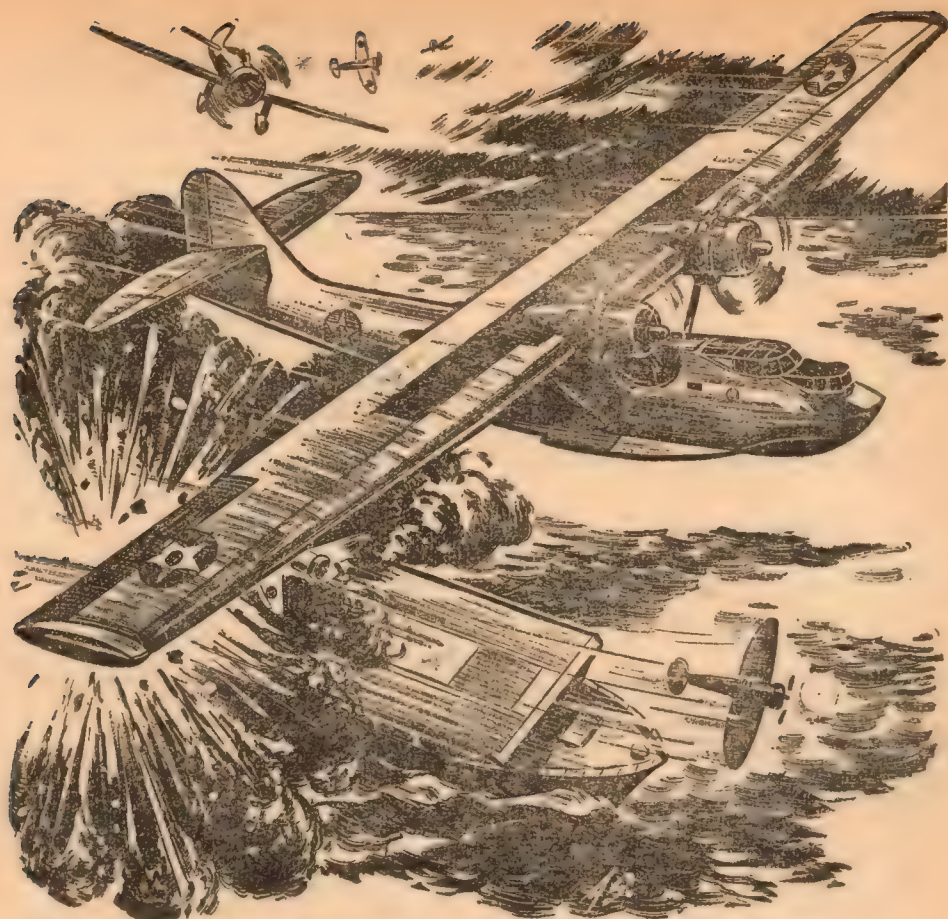
"Good grief!" Pick Yancey gasped, as the situation came home to him. "Slug, we've been bulldozed! Captain Janes bamboozled us!"

Slug's grin was something to see.

"You're telling me! A couple of saps, that's us. Listen, Johnny Reb. Just think what we'll do when we're not kidding!"

Pick shuddered, holding on tight as the tank plowed along.

"You think about it!" he shouted above the motor's roar. "That bomb trap we just got out of will last me a lifetime!"



The stick of bombs tore the Jap plane carrier apart

FIRST COMMAND

By **JOE ARCHIBALD**

*He was only twenty-one, but they gave Walt Stacey
a patrol bomber and wanted his crew back alive!*

THE patrol bomber was seven hundred miles from her base, quartering the wrinkled gray waters of the northern Pacific, with a convoy, heading for Hawaii, spread out below.

The bomber's crew was cold and weary, for the weather had been nasty and most of the sky was filled with rolling, slate-gray clouds. Prone on

the mat in the plane's nose, Bombardier Eddie Brack was grumbling into his chin mike.

"What's become of the Navy, Skipper? I thought they had them big VPB's to sweep the seas of the Nippos. This weather is for ducks, not land birds."

"Stop beefing," the pilot said. "Listen, Brack—listen to the dance music

from Catalina. How would you like to have been in the last war when—"

His voice broke off with a curse and he began firing orders. He checked in his gunners and the rest of his crew, his tone betraying a nibble of nervousness. It was Lieutenant Walter Stacey's first command, and he was remembering all they had told him when he had taken over the bomber. The life of the ship and her crew were his responsibility, and his word was law.

Now he would have to show the stuff he was made of. For down there on the vast expanse of water, looking like a tiny toy floating in a bathtub, was a Jap aircraft carrier. Planes were already lifting from her deck. Stacey heard the bombardier's curses in the nose, and as he brought the heavy bomber down to run up on the target, he yelled at Brack.

"Coming up now! Steady!"

He veered the plane a little to the left when Brack offered a correction. He fought to keep the bomber level for the run-up, for the wind was shouldering heavily against the plane's steel flanks.

The deck of the Nippo carrier loomed up bigger and bigger, and then her deck guns began to open up. The gunners in the bomber's tail and tunnel turrets were beginning to warm up their rifle-caliber guns.

STACEY could hear the howl of tracers just outside the window of the greenhouse as he kept running up on the juicy target. He wanted those bombs to straddle the carrier and so be sure of a hit. There was a brassy taste in his mouth and a grin frozen on his face as he held the bomber steady.

Strange that a man could think at a time like this. Think a thousand thoughts in the space of a few fleeting seconds.

A man commanding a bomber that had sunk an airplane carrier would have something to shout about. Back home, his name would make the front page. Lieutenant Walter Stacey, hero. He guessed his mother would be pretty proud, sure. The girl he had met in Frisco—

But there was someone else that

counted a lot more. Stacey just remembered the kid. His name had been just—well, Stinky.

Funny. A boy would rather be a hero to a certain kid on the block than to anyone else in the world. Stacey wondered if the kid would remember his name. But it had been a long, long time. . . .

Eddie Brack's voice crackled in Stacey's ears. "Steady now," it said.

Stacey waited for several breathless seconds that seemed to run into hours.

"Bombs off!" Brack yelled into his chin mike.

The bomber, lightened, gave a mighty upward swing. The first stick straddled the carrier. Bomb explosion rang in Stacey's ears, sounded above the roar of the Pratt-Whitneys and the buzz of Nippo pursuits.

A Jap kite roared across the track of the heavy bomber. Yank nose guns squirted a burst at it and Stacey saw pieces fly off the Nippo's wing. The Skibby crates buzzing all around looked like Nakajima 96s.

Stacey heard the rattle and crash of Jap lead against the bomber's armor. Then bullets smashed through the ship's nose as Stacey tried to get over the carrier to drop the second stick of bombs. . . .

Funny, Eddie Brack thought. As he peered down from his bombardier's mat, the carrier looked like the little wooden boat he had built in the summer camp in New Hampshire. He used to tie up to the bank and then get up on a limb that arched over the brook. He'd drop rocks down on the little wooden boat.

He got so he could make a direct hit with two out of three rocks. That was fourteen years ago.

"Steady," Eddie Brack said to Stacey while Jap tracers streaked through the smashed nose and scorched the bomber's back. Then Brack jerked the bomb-release. The second stick went down and created terrific havoc on the Jap carrier.

Walter Stacey wished Stinky could see him now. Stinky had always been a hero to him. He wished he had found out what the boy's real name had been.

Kids are like that. They meet on the street casually.

"Hi, pal," or "Howya, Butch," they say.

Then they play together for awhile and it may be months before they bother to identify themselves.

Walter Stacey had known Stinky for only a few hours. They had been unforgettable, terrible hours.

The Nippo pilots, fighting with the fanaticism that is characteristic of the race, threw their planes at the bucketing bomber without regard for system of attack. One seemed about to crash into the Yank kite when Stacey quickly kicked left rudder and nearly threw the bomber over on its back.

Jap lead flayed the greenhouse. A vicious burst came through to rip the life out of the co-pilot, Lieutenant McVey, and to give Walter Stacey the sensation of having been hit on the right arm by a sledge-hammer. Nippo lead tore along the bomber's sleek back and washed out the aerial mast. It sounded like the crack of a thousand bull whips.

Lieutenant Stacey, fighting off a surge of weakness, shook his head savagely and checked in his crew. Rourke, in the rear-gun turret, did not answer. Stacey ordered the radio operator to go back there and take over. Pete Wellman had been a gunner before he had learned how to handle Morse.

THERE was a crackling in the inter-com that made it tough for the members of the crew to hear each other. Eddie Brack came out of the bomb-aimer's compartment and bent over the slumped co-pilot. There was nothing he could do but go back to the nose guns, try to even things up for the dead second officer.

But Brack didn't get in the vengeance shot.

"Good one!" Stacey roared when he saw a Nippo plane become a torch off the port side. "Nice goin', Wellman."

"Wellman, nuts!" came the voice of Sergeant Rourke. "I'm okay, sir. I just got knocked against the upholstery for a minute. Come on, you yellow Skibbies!"

Rourke had knocked off two of the planes from the carrier. Another fighter was going down, its engine trying to tear itself loose from its

snuff-box. Stacey grinned. His crew was giving them murder, he thought.

He tried to forget the pain in his arm. Up ahead was a Nakajima, and it swung around to come at the bomber head-on. Stacey heard the yammer of the guns in the bomber's nose turret, and he guessed that Eddie Brack had given the Nippo a four-second burst.

The Jap caught fire. As Stacey swung the bomber out of the flamer's path, he could see the little yellow man in the Nakajima's office trying to wriggle clear. But the flames and the smoke wrapped him up like an embryo silkworm in a cocoon and he was done.

Brack's face turned toward his skipper and he was laughing. Little trickles of blood ran down one side of his face where pieces of glass had dug in. And blood seeped through his fingers where he was gripping his side.

The bomber got into the clear, but there was a shambles in the nose and in the tunnel. The co-pilot's blood was on the walk and spattering the papers on the navigator's table. The radio operator had a bullet in his leg. He was ripping at his trousers with a knife.

Brack came out of the nose through which a cold wind was racing. The bombardier's face was gray with weariness and the rigors of the scramble.

"We got that carrier, Skipper," Brack said, stepping over McVey's body. "It's heeling over and smoke is boiling out of it. You can see it back there. We—"

Walter Stacey grinned with an effort. He clamped his teeth tightly together to dam up an urge to groan. His stomach was sick and his right hand had no feeling in it. He yelled into the intercom to the radio operator, told him to try and get a trickle of Morse through.

"Try and contact the base," he ordered Wellman. "The fog is coming in and that Number Two engine is starting to act up. Help the guy up, Brack."

Rourke came away from the rear turret, looking like a tired bear in his bulky flying leather. He took a big bite from a black tobacco plug and rolled the chunk to the correct posi-

tion in his cheek. The stuff put color into his face.

Mike Rourke had joined the war from the eighteenth story of a skyscraper, and he could do more with a machine-gun than he could with a riveting hammer. He tossed his 'chute to the walk and sat on it, and he kept cursing the Japs.

The bomber droned on, fog clinging to it. That was the stuff Stacey was afraid of. Fog! His fear of it went back a long way. He tried to forget the pain of his wound and concentrate on the singing of the Pratt-Whitneys.

Yes, that discordant note was there. Nippo lead had found its way into the steel viscera of that port engine. Stacey looked toward Brack, whose face shone in a cone of amber light over the navigator's table. He had a funny feeling about Lieutenant Brack even though he had only known the man for seventeen hours.

Lieutenant Walter Stacey had sunk a Jap carrier with his first command, and the thought should have acted upon him as a strong stimulant. But somehow it failed to have its way with him. His brain was mulled by a growing uneasiness, and memory was the motivating force behind it. . . .

STINKY'S father had run that summer camp. Walter Stacey had come to it from New York and his parents had been nicely fixed. He had been pretty homesick that first day. The mountains around the camp seemed to have become great towering giants that kept edging toward him, as though they intended to crush him to pieces.

Stinky came up to him late one afternoon, a little shyly.

"Hi, kid," he said to Walt. "You're from the city, huh?"

"Yes. What's your name?"

"They just call me Stinky."

"My name's Walt."

That was all either of them had wanted to know. Stinky had sized up the city kid quickly.

"Let's climb Sugarloaf," he had said. "That's the mountain nearest here. It looks high from here but it ain't really so high. It's a cinch. How about it? Or are you scairt?"

Walt had been afraid but he had not let Stinky know he was.

"I'll bet I ain't," he had snapped. "Come on."

The two boys had set out. . . .

Lieutenant Stacey dropped altitude. Down to two thousand feet, he stared at his instruments and felt the cold lump under his breastbone swell a little. Fuel for another hour, perhaps. The fog was all the way down. He heard Eddie Brack's voice in the intercom and the navigator was trying to call the base. He heard the radio operator curse as he tried to make repairs.

"Not far off the coast, Skipper," Brack said. "Maybe a hundred miles. Setting course for Seattle. We'll make it, sir."

It had been a little different at the summer camp.

It had taken the two boys an hour and a half to get to the top of Sugarloaf. The mountain was only about twelve hundred feet high, but in spots the ascent was dangerous. They sat up there until the sun went down.

"We better start down before it gets too dark," Stinky said finally.

Even then the fog was lifting from the lowlands, and they could not see the lights down there. Halfway down the side of the mountain, the stuff was as thick as soup and Walt Stacey could not hide his terror. He hung back once, pressed his little body against a ledge and let the tears come.

Stinky came back to him.

"Look," he said. "You just follow me and keep hold of me. I know this mountain like anythin', kid. Stop cryin', will ya? You'll be okay if you'll just stick with me."

Walt Stacey let Stinky lead him down through the fog. Everything was horribly opaque and as quiet as the depths of the sea. The city boy slipped on an outcropping of rock and lost his grip on Stinky's sleeve. He screamed as he slid fifteen feet down the slope and landed on a narrow shelf.

When Stinky got to him, Walt was badly stunned and there was a long gash in his arm just above the wrist. Stinky felt the warm blood trickle through his fingers when he examined

the wound. It was bad, all right. He wouldn't tell Walt how bad it was.

"I'll fix it, kid," Stinky said. "I brought my flashlight an' I got a handkerchief here. Listen, we'll git down, kid. We got up here, didn't we? You stick with old Stinky and he'll see you through."

"I'm afraid," Walt said, fighting to keep his terror locked up in his throat. "We'll get killed. Let's stay here until morning an' then—"

"Nothin' doin'," Stinky said stoutly. "I'll get a sweet lickin' if my ol' man finds out I climbed up here—an' you don't know how he can lick a guy. He's in town an' won't git back until late, so I got to git back first."

"Look, you ain't a sissy like most city kids, Walt. We can make it. Down there they are goin' to have a hot dog roast about nine o'clock. Hot dogs over an open fire. Baked spuds and jellied doughnuts. Somethin' to go for, huh?"

"Yeah," Walt said tearfully. "Yeah. I'll try. But this arm hurts somethin' awful, Stinky. Maybe it's broke."

Stinky would have stayed on the mountain all night if Walt had not been hurt. But the kid was bleeding and he might die if he bled much more. Stinky had to get him down through the fog. He had to admit he was a little scared himself the rest of the way down.

He finally got the city kid to the camp, and everybody said Stinky was a hero. The cut in Walt's arm was bad and they had to take five stitches in it. Walt's parents came and got him late the next day, and Stinky never saw the boy again. . . .

THAT had been long ago. The fog was smothering the limping patrol bomber now. Night was moving in. The icy wind drove through the smashed nose and through the greenhouse, and it sent a numbness sweeping over Lieutenant Walter Stacey. That latent fear was making itself felt, the fear of fog and crash landing.

He remembered the night of the training flight when Captain Workman, his instructor, tried to land a bomber outside Glendale, California. Stacey could see the terrible flash of

the high tension wires in the murk ahead. That had been a bad night. . . .

The patrol bomber was flying blind over the northeastern Pacific now, buzzing through a sky that had no beginning and no end. There were no horizons and no sounds, save the sporadic voices of the crew and the ragged whine of the engines.

Stacey wondered how much blood he was losing, the way he had wondered on that night on Sugarloaf. He was afraid. They shouldn't give a twenty-one-year old youngster a bomber to fly on his first command. Bombers could be big and clumsy and mean.

Through the crackling in the intercom, Stacey heard snatches of talk from the crew. Abstractedly, at first, for he had forgotten the crew while rambling back over the years.

"Look, Lieutenant Brack," Rourke was saying. "You got more than just glass cuts. Here, you need a drink. I got a couple of swallows left— Yeah, pour it down. Got one in the ribs, didn't you, Lieutenant? Those treacherous Skibbies—"

"I'll be okay, Sarge. It isn't much."

"If it hurts, take a bite of this plug and chew on the stuff. . . . That engine is cutting out, Lieutenant."

Stacey swung his head around and looked at Eddie Brack. The bombardier's face had a strange look. Maybe it was the color of the lights that did it. But there were little beads of sweat glistening on his forehead and around his mouth.

Brack grinned back at Stacey and lifted a thumb toward the roof.

Stacey was in a fog of his own, a fog of apprehension. He began to curse every man born under the flag of the Rising Sun. The Japs had left him with one man standing on his own feet.

He wished he had a co-pilot to take over. He thought of the things Eddie Brack had said back at the base. The bombardier had tried for a pilot's spot but his reflexes had been too slow. The flight surgeons had thumbed him down, had advised him to try for some other job aboard the bombers.

Brack could have landed the patrol bomber in a pinch, but Brack was hurt. It was up to Walter Stacey, the

skipper, for the lives of his men were his primary responsibility.

Two of them would never survive a parachute jump, he knew. He was ashamed of his thoughts, his confession of weakness. He tried to get himself organized and act like a guy who had a right to command a bomber.

His arm was getting numb. The pains had changed to a continuous dull ache that crept up to his shoulder and into the muscles of his neck.

"I wouldn't never jump from one of these kites," Rourke was saying. "It's the principle of the thing an' I ain't got no interest in that cold ocean. When I hang that 'chute on its hook, I figure on leavin' it there."

Rourke was trying to make them all feel good. When you wanted a laugh you sought out Rourke.

"I got a girl back in New York an' I'd like to see her again. Sure, she carries the torch for the air force and the Marines and the sailors. She waves good-by to them all. I call her Libby and I got her picture in the turret. Good old Libby—on Bedloe's Island—the only girl you can trust—"

Lieutenant Eddie Brack managed a laugh.

"I need a chew, Sarge," Pete Wellman called out. "This fool leg—"

LIEUTENANT Walter Stacey turned a knob in front of him and a panel opened in the bomber's belly. He gave it a second twist and a flare went down. A dazzling light appeared in the fog below the bomber, and then it became a slowly descending will-o'-the-wisp that made little illumination in soup that reached to the very tip of the white-capped waves.

Fog! Stacey had known only one fog that was thicker. That fog up on Sugarloaf Mountain. A great weakness drove words out of his mouth.

"No use," he yelled into the intercom. "We can't land in this stuff. Open the escape hatch, Rourke. Stand by for abandoning—"

Eddie Bracks' head snapped up and he clutched wildly at the edges of the navigator's table.

"Skipper, we can't— Your first command, Lieutenant—"

"Yeah, my first command, Brack," Stacey said bitterly. "You got my orders! I'm in command and don't you forget it. We'll crash in this fog and wipe us all out. Open that hatch, Rourke! Hook Wellman's 'chute on and help him out. Then you, Brack. Then Rourke. I'll be along—"

His words shook as he poured them into his chin mike, and even as they were uttered he wished he could have yanked them back.

"Nuts!" Rourke said. "These guys won't live five minutes in that water."

Stacey swung his head around and then he saw Lieutenant Eddie Brack coming toward him. The man held a dimmed torch and the light of it struck against Stacey's face. The young skipper did not want his crew to see the fear in his eyes.

He lifted his arm and struck at the torch. Eddie Brack gripped him by the wrist and flung his arm back, and the bomber began to pitch in the fog.

"Brack, I'm in command—"

Stacey's words broke off. Brack's face wore a stunned look and it took all the suffering out of his eyes. Brack seemed ready to collapse, and Rourke was pulling at him and telling him to take it easy.

"Rourke," Brack said. "Leave this to me. Get away from me. Go back and— Look, Skipper! We're over the coast. We can make it now. We got up here and we can get down."

"Stick with Stinky, kid, and everything will be okay. I'll get you out of this. Hold on tight. Look, you bombed a Jap carrier on your first command. They are waiting down there to take your picture. They're going to call you a hero. Hot dog! That's something to go for, kid."

"Stinky!" Stacey yelled, and he wondered if he was in another world. But that had been years ago. . . . And then Walt Stacey snapped out of it.

"Stinky!" he shouted. "Yeah, we're in a fog, aren't we? We can fall and get killed, Stinky. No, we'll make it."

The young skipper laughed a little and clamped his jaws tight. He shook his head to get a lot of the fog out of his eyes, fog that was not the fault of the weather.

Yeah, he would have to set the bomber down. Stinky was hurt bad,

and he had to show Stinky that he had a lot of stuff in him. He should have gone back to Sugarloaf a long time ago for another try at that mountain.

The first time was always tough. A guy had to lick something on the second try or he was through. If Walt let Stinky bring him down again, there was no hope left for the city kid.

"Stick with me, Stinky," Walt Stacey said. "You're hit bad, I know that. But I'll get you down. I got to, Stinky. You know that. My first command. I can't fold up this time.

"Fog, Stinky. The devil with it. You know, I think I see the lights down there the way we saw 'em—"

"Yeah. There's nothing to it, kid," Lieutenant Eddie Brack yelled at Stacey's shoulder. "Drop another flare, sir. The fog don't look half as thick as it was."

"To me it doesn't, Stinky," Stacey ground out, and turned the knob twice.

THE bright flare split the fog but the stuff closed in again. The altimeter said two thousand feet. The port engine was silent and the fog poured into the nose of the bomber like smoke. Stacey kept going down, probing the area below with eyes that ached from the strain.

"I just swallowed my cud and that is what makes me look scairt, sir," Rourke said. "How's the arm, Lieutenant? Okay, I've walked away from two write-offs an' I got to lose sometimes. I got somethin' to think about when I'm in a cast.

"Three Nippos, sir," Rourke went on. "Funny, you git scairt in the turret at first. Like the first time goin' after geese. When you get the lead bird, you are all set. Like buck fever—

"Me worryin'? I'm kiddin'. The skipper will get us down— Who is this guy Stinky?"

Fuel for twenty minutes. The bomber bucked a headwind that was almost a gale. The aircraft shook like a wounded duck when it fell into pockets, and Eddie Brack hung on and babbled stuff to Walt Stacey.

Walter Stacey made out some blurred lights and he went lower. The

muscles in his jaws were stretched tight and paining him.

"Slap her down, sir," Rourke said.

They were only a hundred feet up and Brack brushed sweat off his face.

"You hit her on the nose, kid. That's Boeing Field, Seattle, and twenty miles away there's a field that never has fog. You know it, Walt. Paine Field. The one the air mail pilot spotted a long time ago. Where weather gets freaky—an item for Ripley, Skipper.

"We can make it there. You know—where they dropped the flour sacks to mark it. Head her there, Walt. I got to lay down, kid. I'll see you— You can make it, kid."

The bombardier caved in. Walt Stacey set himself for the twenty-mile run to the commercial port.

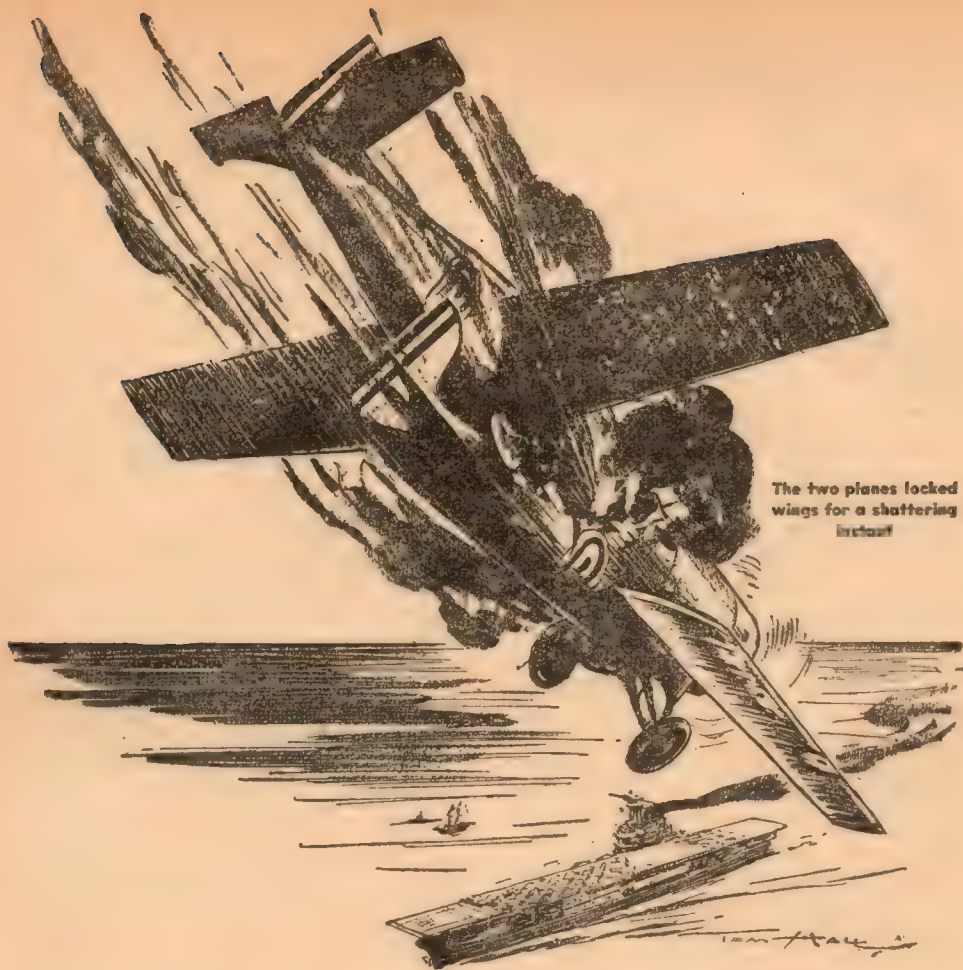
"Don't mind us, sir," Wellman said. "Me and Rourke are nice and comfy. That engine is still singing nice and even. What is twenty miles—we've come seven hundred—"

Everything was all right. Lieutenant Walter Stacey had to bring Stinky in this time, for there was no telling how much of the precious stuff the guy had lost. You lick a thing the first time and you've always got it licked. Like the first olive or the first wallop of castor oil or the first opera. Two miles from the commercial field, the last drop of fuel in the bomber was sucked up. Walt Stacey took the riddled bomber in and put her down on a field that was almost free of fog. The Jap bullets had smashed the hydraulic landing gear and the wheels would not go down. The kite ripped along the turf on her belly, ground-looped and finally came to rest.

The men in the tunnel got a good shaking up and wounds started to bleed again. . . .

AFTERWARD they brought the papers to the hospital. They let the heroes read the stirring account of the sinking of the Jap airplane carrier, the *Hirado*. An American destroyer had reached the scene soon after the action. The *Hirado* had already started to slip, stern first, below the surface of the great Pacific.

(Concluded on page 96)



SAILORS LAST FOREVER

By **WALTER H. SPRINGS**

They called Lieutenant Baker, ace of World War One, a has-been—but as a replacement in Naval Aviation Squadron Twenty-six, he shows he still has plenty of fight in him!

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER STAFFORD was young, one of the Navy's flying fools, and commanding officer of the Twenty-sixth Naval Aviation Fighter Squadron shore-based at Boston, Massachusetts. He had been the O.C. now for

all of two weeks, and was pretty well pleased with his job and the prospects for the future.

True, he yearned for some real aerial combat activity instead of the seemingly unending over-water patrols, looking for U-boats that nobody

ever saw. But perhaps action would come later.

The pilots under him were all close to his age; good guys every one of them. And so far the admirals, the Washington Brass Hats, and other such big-wigs had left Twenty-six strictly alone.

In short, everything was fine. And then one day, a couple of months after Pearl Harbor, a replacement pilot pushed into Stafford's station office, and gave him a salute that was executed with a very tricky twist of the wrist.

"Lieutenant Baker reporting for active duty, sir," the new arrival said. "And am I tickled silly to get back into the old harness again! Always said we were too easy on them back in 'eighteen. But this time we'll slap 'em down so's they'll stay down. Right, sir?"

The smile of greeting on Stafford's lips stiffened, and a cold lump started to form in his stomach. He had instantly liked the looks of the new replacement. The man was well-built, had a square jaw, and a pair of steel-blue eyes that told the world he could take it and dish it out, too.

But he spoiled everything when he opened his mouth. And the 1917-18 overseas service ribbon he wore under his wings caused Stafford to groan inwardly. Another has-been back in service raring to go, as though twenty-four years was no longer than twenty-four minutes.

Why did the recruiting officers let such things happen?

"Glad to have you with us, Lieutenant," Stafford said mechanically. "Let me see your papers, please."

"Sure, sir. Coming right up. Boy, oh, boy! Is it good to be back in it again!"

Stafford took the replacement's papers, studied them, and felt hope die in him completely. They were all in order. Baker had served overseas in the last one for thirteen months. His record was good, and he had kept his finger in aviation after the war.

He was forty-one, had some twelve thousand hours on all types in his log-book, and was in perfect health. He had reapplied for his commission after Pearl Harbor, and had satisfac-

torily passed all the tests, and was now being assigned to active duty with Twenty-six. And that was that.

STAFFORD folded the papers and slipped them into the desk drawer, took a deep breath, and looked at the new replacement some sixteen years his senior.

"Well, welcome again, Lieutenant," he said. "I'll appoint you to Section Three. Lieutenant Tracey is the section leader. He'll acquaint you with the ropes around here. You'll find him over at the mess, now. The others, too. Better go over and get acquainted."

"Yes, sir!" Baker said and pulled the wrist twist again. "Sure want to get to know the bunch. Maybe I can give them a tip or two on how we used to do it. Boy! The things we used to fly then! Why, I remember one time at Brest I was—"

"Yes, it was a pretty tough war, that one," Stafford cut in coldly. "But I've got things to do, Lieutenant. I'll see you later."

"Fair enough, sir," Baker said and wheeled around toward the door. "This one won't be over for a couple of days, I guess. Well, sure is good to get in and pitch again."

An hour or so later Stafford finished his paper work, left the station office and went over to the officers' "wardroom" ashore. No sooner had he opened the door, and taken one step inside, than the tension in the place seemed to slap him like a brickbat.

The pilots of Twenty-six were lounging about trying their best to shut their ears to the ceaseless babble that came from the lips of the lone figure at the bar. That lone figure was Lieutenant Baker, and he was sounding forth on a certain day at Brest when practically the fate of the entire Allied cause rested on the shoulders of a couple of Navy pilots who were doing something or other.

Stafford didn't listen to what it was they had been doing. Neither did anyone else, save the non-commissioned lad back of the bar who had to because a senior officer was throwing words right at him. Choking back the wrath that mounted in his throat Stafford went over to Tracey's table and

dropped into a seat. The Number Three section leader gave him a sour smile and a little shake of his head.

"He doesn't stay, Staff, does he?" he muttered.

"His papers are all in order," Stafford replied. "Nothing I can do about it—unless he flops on the job. Doesn't seem to mind the silence treatment at all?"

"Ever meet one of the World War One heroes you could shut up, once he got started?" Tracey growled. "It's enough to make a guy bail out with no chute. Why the devil don't these old has-beens stay home with their wives and sixteen kids, and let the present generation fight this one?"

"Because they don't know any better, I guess," Stafford said and sighed. "I don't know."

"Well, he tells me you're assigning him to my section," Tracey said darkly. "So, I'm telling you now! If his wings or something drop off while he's on patrol, I don't know a thing about it! Look, Staff, isn't there something? Grandpa Blow-Hard will have us bats in a week."

Stafford started to shake his head, but checked it as a bright thought suddenly came to mind.

"Maybe there is," he said slowly. "It really depends on him, but—"

"But what?" Tracey prodded as the commanding officer hesitated and scowled down at the table-top.

"As CO I have the right to accept or refuse him on his flying ability," Stafford said presently. "If I think his flying is a menace to squadron operation I can certainly ground him until I arrange for him to be transferred to another base. But, if his flying is okay, I'd just get my own hide burned for trying to pull something for personal reasons."

"Personal, nuts!" Tracey growled. "It would be unanimous. But, anyway, let's take him out on patrol, and pray hard—for the worst!"

"All right," Stafford said, and pushed up onto his feet. "Get your section together. I'll go along with you, just to get some time in my log-book. But, listen, Tracey! Don't purposely put the guy in a jam. Play it fair to him. He's a gabby cuss, and we don't like the set of his jib, but we've got to

give him the same breaks we'd expect for ourselves."

"I promise," Tracey said. "Just routine formation and dive stuff. If he's good, that's our tough luck. If he isn't, that's his!"

A LITTLE over an hour later seven Pratt and Whitney-powered Grumman F4F "Wildcats" took off from Twenty-six's base and went thundering out across Boston Harbor toward deep water beyond the tip of Cape Cod. Although originally designed as fighter aircraft exclusively, alterations and additions had been made to Twenty-six's planes so that each now carried a deadly aerial torpedo slung under the belly, and a couple of small size TNT "ashcans". Just in case a U-boat or surface raider needed attention before bombers or patrol vessels could reach the scene.

As yet the boys of Twenty-six hadn't sighted a single thing that even smelled of the enemy, but they didn't let inactivity put them off guard. The planes were kept fully armed and loaded, and no flight was ever made without the pilot being prepared to shoot the works at the drop of the hat.

Flying in the lead of the seven-plane patrol was Tracey, the section leader. At top rear cover was Stafford. And at Number Two on the right was Lieutenant Baker, of the gabby mouth, and of World War One.

Automatically keeping perfect position at the tail of the formation, Stafford fixed his eyes on Baker's plane and kept them there. Baker had made a good take-off, and he was doing all right at the moment in the matter of holding his position.

That, however, didn't mean a thing. When Tracey started tossing the formation all over the sky in a few practice maneuvers then would come the proof of whether or not forty-one years were much to many for World War Two kind of flying.

"Not that I don't admire the old duffer for signing up to do his bit again," Stafford growled softly. "But why in thunder doesn't the Navy Department form some kind of a veterans' squadron for guys like him, and let us fellows carry our own load in peace?"

He didn't answer his own question. He didn't even give it a second thought, for at that moment came the crackle of Base Operations on the ground over the radio.

"Attention Section Three!" the unseen speaker barked. "Unidentified surface craft report at Area Location Six-Four-B. Proceed at once for investigation and identification. Report your findings as soon as possible. Operations off."

No sooner had the radio gone silent than Tracey's voice giving the "Okay" acknowledgement crackled in Stafford's earphones. And at practically the same instant the section leader wheeled his patrol to the southeast, and went roaring ahead at full throttle.

Ten minutes later the reported craft was sighted. Stafford took one look and swore softly under his breath. For the umpty-umpteenth time Base Operations had sent them tearing off: on another floperoo. The craft was a three-masted, auxiliary-powered fishing boat out of Boston.

Stafford had seen her, and the half dozen sister craft that made up the fishing fleet more times than he could remember. This one was the *Sally Jane*, out of T-Wharf. He could tell her by the funny-looking Chic Sale affair built about the wheel to protect the helmsman in dirty weather.

"Operations is getting worse than these civilian defense aircraft spotters that are cluttering up the landscape!" Stafford snorted. "Oh, well, a dive attack will give us something to do, and give those salt water boys a thrill, or something . . . Pick your target, Tracey, for practice!"

He barked the last into his flap mike, and braced himself at the same time. A split second later the seven-plane patrol was roaring down at thunderbolt fury toward the little fishing craft plodding steadily through the swells. Hunched over the stick, and with his mouth open to relieve the pressure in his ears, Stafford held his position nicely and kept his eyes fixed on the "target" below.

AND then suddenly he saw it happen. One of the Grummans pulled sharply out to the side, eased

up out of its dive, and went curving up and around toward shore. Stafford snapped his gaze in that direction, and dragged down the corners of his mouth. The pilot of the plane that had broken out of the dive attack was Lieutenant Baker.

A good look at the plane hightailing for shore showed Stafford no black smoke pouring from the exhaust engine trouble. That meant there was only one answer. The new replacement didn't have what it takes, and Navy doctors should have spotted that before they let him get back into uniform.

Smoldering rage burned in Stafford instead of relief that he had good reason to ground Baker, and request his transfer.

"Return to your formation position, Baker!" he bellowed into his flap mike. "Take up a position in back of me. That's an order!"

"Can't do it, sir!" came the reply from the plane that was now fast becoming a speck in the west. "This engine's going haywire. Got to get back before I sit down in the drink. Sorry, sir!"

Words boiled up in Stafford's throat, but they got all tangled up with each other and clogged before he could get them out. When his rage would let him speak, Baker's Grumman was lost to view.

By then, also, the dive attack on the *Sally Jane* had been completed. Section Three was circling the craft and wagging wings in acknowledgement of the hand waves from the three or four fishermen who had come topside. A moment or two later Tracey gave a flat-voiced report to Operations back at the base. And a couple of moments after that Stafford washed out the patrol, and gave orders for the return to the base.

The instant he had taxied up to the line and landed and had turned over his plane to the waiting mechanics, he started looking for Lieutenant Baker.

Then he received his first shock. Baker had not returned. Neither had any report come through that he was down some place.

Not until five hours later did Baker's Grumman come sliding in over the bordering trees and sit down,

light as a feather. Stafford heard it from the mess and went bounding outside at once. In long strides he covered the ground to the side of Baker's plane.

The veteran of World War One grinned at him sheepishly and climbed down from the pit. He swallowed a couple of times before he spoke.

"Guess I got lost coming back, sir," he said. "Anyway, when the old engine started kicking up bad, and I figured I'd better sit down, I found myself over Marshfield way down the coast. It was some wires yanked loose by the dive. Worked on her a bit, and got her going again. She's okay, now. Reminds me of one time in 'seventeen. I was—"

"Not interested!" Stafford snapped him off. "I ordered you back into formation. Your engine was doing all right when you pulled off. In *this* war, Baker, orders are supposed to be obeyed, no matter what!"

Sadness, anger, and cold steel seemed to take turns flashing in Baker's eyes before he spoke. When he did there was resentment against injustice in his voice.

"Come back and probably flop down in the drink, sir?" he complained. "That wouldn't have helped at all. Why, in the last one a pilot decided for himself what—"

"This is forty-two, Baker!" Stafford bit off. Then with scorn dripping from every word, he added, "Well, stop worrying about force-landing in the ocean and getting your clothes wet. I'm grounding you, Baker, until I've checked on a few things. One of them, your medical. Frankly, I think you're too old to stand a dive attack. I'll let you know, later, what will be done. Meantime, stick around the base and stay out of the air!"

ONCE again sadness, anger, and cold steel were reflected in Baker's eyes. They were gone in an instant, and he half grinned and shrugged.

"Very good, sir," he said and turned away. "But, they've sure got some new rules since the last one."

Stafford didn't bother to make any comment to that. He swung on his

heel and went over to the mess for a drink or two to take the bad taste out of his mouth. Tracey was already there and a question was in the section leader's eyes and forming on his lips.

Stafford shook his head, turned the thumb of one hand toward the floor, and that was that. The sigh of relief that escaped the lips of those who had seen the wash-out sign was like the murmur of a gentle breeze in the pines.

Late that afternoon two items came to Stafford's notice. One fanned the anger that still simmered within him, and the other set his heart to pounding with eager anticipation. The first was the report he received from the chief machinist's mate of Section Three. An examination of Baker's plane had found the engine in perfect shape, *and* not one single bit of evidence that loose wires, or anything else had been hastily repaired. In short, not a hand had touched the engine since last it was in the shop.

The second item had been a summons for Stafford from Radio Operations at the field. There a decoded message just received informed him that the aircraft carrier *Wright* was to make Boston tomorrow morning around eight. Twenty-six had been designated to fly out to a rendezvous at sea and escort her in.

It was routine, of course, and no more than a service salute to a Navy craft that had performed splendid service during the last month in the Battle of the Atlantic. Routine, sure, but at least it was a different kind of routine, and Stafford felt good inside.

Also, there was just the possibility—just the barest possibility—that the *Wright's* coming to Boston might mean a transfer for Twenty-six to sea duty.

Clinging hard to that hope, Stafford stuffed the decoded message in his pocket and grinned at the three junior ratings who made up Radio Operations personnel. He went swinging out the door to go over to the mess and break the good news to the others.

He almost fell flat on his face as he bumped into Lieutenant Baker who was standing just outside the door.

The replacement's mouth started to open, but Stafford checked him with an angry shake of his head.

"Save it, Baker!" he snapped. "I'm believing the chief machinist's mate's report on your ship. So, save it!"

"But, wait a minute, sir!" Baker cried. "I—"

But that's all Stafford heard. He had turned away and was hotfooting it over to the officers' lounge.

The pilots of Twenty-six were equally tickled pink to get the news, and they at once set about making plans for some trick escort formations they would fly over the "big lady" the next morning. That took up the time until evening mess.

It was at evening mess that Stafford suddenly realized that Baker wasn't around. Nor did the man put in an appearance after mess. For a couple of hours Stafford figured that Baker was too sore or too ashamed to show his face.

But when it grew close to midnight and station taps, and still no Baker, Stafford started looking about and asking questions around the station. The results of both added up to absolutely nothing. Nobody had seen or heard of Baker for hours. He had just up and vanished from the base.

STAFFORD issued orders for the man to be brought to him the instant he was found, then went over to his quarters to get some shut-eye before the early dawn escort patrol. The course of the *Wright* had been contained in the message, and to meet her at the rendezvous point at eight sharp Twenty-six would have to take off by seven at least.

And so it was that at six-thirty next morning Stafford's rise-and-shine-trained brain, plus the roar of aircraft engines out on the line, pried his eyes open and routed him out of bed. Within ten minutes he was outside and headed for the line. And he saw Tracey's Grumman leave the line like an arrow leaves the bowstring, and go tearing away in a whirlwind take-off.

"Fine time to test your crate, Tracey!" Stafford grunted and hurried up his pace. "I told all you guys yesterday afternoon that we'd take off together, and—"

The words froze on Stafford's lips. His muscles froze, too, and he came to an abrupt halt. A man in Naval Aviation uniform, who looked as if he had just stepped out of a meat grinder came streaking around the corner of the end hangar and vaulted into the pit of the first plane he could reach.

That plane happened to be Stafford's, but it was not the fact that his plane was being swiped that brought a bull's roar to his lips. It was the fact that the battered and torn uniformed thief was none other than Lieutenant Baker. And before Stafford's roar could be tagged with an echo, Baker had the senior officer's Grumman ripping out across the field.

The take-off seemed to throw off the trance shackles that held Stafford. As a second bellow burst from his lips he bolted the rest of the way to the hangar line at top speed. But no sooner had he reached there than he almost ran smack into a man in pilot's garb striding out of Number Three hangar. The man was Tracey, and Stafford's eyes bugged out as he gaped at his friend.

"Who's in your plane?" he shouted.

"Huh?" Tracey replied, with a blank look. "My plane? Why nobody. What's—"

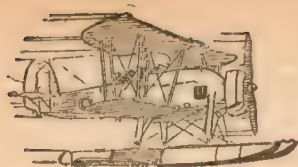
The section leader bit off the last short as his eyes suddenly focused on the vacant place in the line of planes. He opened his mouth to roar just as one of the mechanics came dashing over with amazement and bewilderment plastered all over his freckled face.

"Hey, Lieutenant, what you doing here?" the mechanic choked out. "I thought it was you that got in that plane and took off. You had your goggles pulled down and your mouth flap fastened so I . . . But, it wasn't you, was it?"

Whatever Tracey replied Stafford didn't wait to hear. The two stolen planes were now specks in the dawn-flooded sky and about ready to disappear for good somewhere out over the broad expanse of the North Atlantic.

Sight of those two planes speeding away and action became one for Twenty-six's young commander. In

(Continued on page 89)



The TAKEOFF

A Department for Readers



THANKS, readers! Your response to our contest has been overwhelming! Thousands of letters have been received from every section of the country, letters filled to the brim with worth-while ideas, suggestions and opinions that will help us plan future issues of ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES.

You will remember that we offered prizes in the form of War Savings Stamps for the best letters. In announcing the winners, we can only say that all the letters were great—and we wish we could award a prize to every one of them!

It gives a big lift to those of us who toil away, trying to produce an up-to-date magazine on American aviation, to know that so many of you are eager to get your oars in.

Selecting the prize winners has been no easy task, for by far the greatest bulk of the letters we received had interesting ideas on how to make the magazine better. Naturally, many readers sent along similar ideas, and the problem was one of choosing the best expression of an idea rather than the idea itself in most cases.

Well, anyway, here goes—and we're ready to do some fast dodging!

The Winners!

ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES' first prize of ten dollars in War Stamps goes to Thomas Van Wormer, 230 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York. It reads, in part, as follows:

I should like to see ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES have (1) a department for reader opinion; (2) true stories of today's American sky heroes; (3) two exciting novels every issue along with short stories; (4) features like "The Army Is Up There" and "Wings of the Fleet"; (5) personal messages from famous flyers. This

WAR STAMP WINNERS!

Here are the results in our contest for the best letters containing ideas and suggestions for our future issues!

FIRST PRIZE \$10 IN STAMPS

*Won by Thomas Van Wormer,
230 Washington Avenue, Albany, N. Y.*

SECOND PRIZE \$5 IN STAMPS

*Won by Joe Petrick
Box 137, Brilliant, Ohio*

FIVE PRIZES \$1 EACH IN STAMPS

Won by Montgomery Mulford, 1450 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, N. Y.; Paul Zimmerman, Amana, Iowa; Edward W. Witkowski, 4340 Buchanan Avenue, Detroit, Mich.; Joe Kutchi, 808 Peace Street, Hazelton, Pa.; and Wayne Kridner, R.F.D. No. 4, Pontiac, Ill.

**AND MANY THANKS TO ALL THE
OTHER CONTESTANTS FOR THEIR
SPLENDID SUBMISSIONS!**

will all take time, but if it is eventually put into effect, it will make ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES tops.

The advice in Van Wormer's letter is excellent, sound and well-rounded. But it was not far ahead of the rest of the field. To prove it, here's the second prize letter, the winner of five dollars in War Stamps.

It is by Joe Petrick, Box 137, Brilliant, Ohio.

For the benefit of airplane lovers like myself, I would like to see ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES run in each issue a full-page photograph and description of one of the world's commercial or war planes. With such a picture in each issue, aviation fans could start a scrapbook they'd be glad to have.

The Five One-Dollar Prizes

Well, there are our two big prize

letters. Picking the remaining five one-dollar winners was one heck of a job. But we finally narrowed the field down to the quintet we felt were most valuable.

Montgomery Mulford, 1450 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, N. Y., takes third place with this one:

I like the features—especially by Merwin and Stoddard—on Army and Navy flying. Such articles, combined with more illustrations of types of planes, will help morale, keep us better posted on aviation progress. I'd like to offer a further suggestion that you include not only picture pages drawn from new stories on current military and naval aviation, but also features on our fighting forces of other days. There are some excitingly dramatic and entertaining true tales that still lie buried in the records and have not yet achieved the prominence they deserve.

Paul Zimmerman of Amana, Iowa, takes fourth place:

I think ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES should have more features like "Wings of the Fleet" and "The Army Is Up There." Adventure stories about Libya, India and Australia—and especially about the "Flying Tigers," which would be patriotic and give your readers a good idea of what war today is like.

Edward W. Witkowski, 4340 Buchanan Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, gets next call with this:

I believe you should have a club in which letters and drawings of readers could be published. Perhaps you could have a club pin so that members could identify themselves to other members.

The sixth spot in our contest goes to Joe Kutchi, 808 Peace Street, Hazleton, Pennsylvania, whose ideas are expressed below:

My first suggestion is that ARMY NAVY FLYING STORIES should be printed once a month. I also think a club should be formed and a department made for members. If not a club, anyway a department for readers who would like pen pals.

Last but not least is Wayne Kridner, RFD No. 4, Pontiac, Illinois:

I believe you should print a story about Colin Kelly. Because of his heroism, I think we'd all like to read a story of his life so that we can revere his memory.

Well, that's that. Every suggestion makes plenty of sense, and you can rest assured that we of the staff

[Turn page]

PROVES MAN IS GOD

A strange method of mind and body control, that leads to immense powers never before experienced, is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, F.R.G.S., well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report improvement in health. Others acquire superb bodily strength, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often, with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

This startling method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western world.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth, and the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized by a false idea of what we really are.

Most of us know that God is everywhere, but never realize that God cannot be everywhere without being also in us. And if He is in us, then all His wisdom, all His power—unlimited knowledge and infinite power—is likewise in us. If God is everywhere, then there is nothing but God, and we also are that—a completely successful human life being the expression of God in man. The Holy Spirit of the Bible is an actual living force in man, and through it we too can do "greater things than these." The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing our minds of the hypnotizing ideas which blind us to the vast power of this living force within us.



A nine-thousand word treatise, revealing the startling results of this system, is now being offered free to anyone who quickly sends his name and address. Write promptly to the address below, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

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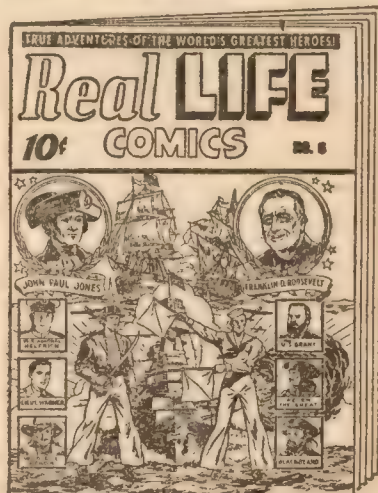
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SAILORS LAST FOREVER

(Continued from page 85)

three wild leaps he reached the nearest Grumman that had its prop ticking over. A fourth leap took him into the pit, and almost before his pants hit the chute pack in the seat he had kicked off the wheel brakes and belted the throttle wide open.

The Grumman lunged forward like a frightened deer, and white pain flared up in Stafford's brain as the standing start snapped his head back. It was gone as quickly as it had come, however, and in the next split second he was hunched way over the stick, and in sea pirate terms cursing the plane on to greater speed.

THE instant he could, he hauled the ship clear, let his wheels come up, and vertical banked around toward the east and the two black specks that were sliding into the flaming banners of the new day's sun.

Twenty minutes later land was far down over the horizon behind Stafford's tail. His altitude was no more than five hundred feet over the water, but he didn't dare waste precious seconds to get more for fear of completely losing the two black specks far ahead and still bearing eastward.

Another fifteen minutes and Stafford thought that he had gained a little on the two planes. The leading one was about three miles out in front of the second one. And perhaps sixteen or seventeen miles separated the second plane and Stafford's. He held his gaze on them, and then suddenly the direction of the course being flown exploded like a great white light in his brain.

The two planes far out ahead of him, there, were flying a perfect crow course for a point a few miles south of Twenty-six's rendezvous point with the carrier, *Wright*! However, because the take-off had been made sooner, and because the *Wright's* course was from south to north, the two planes ahead were actually flying right straight toward the carrier.

Realization brought a puzzled
[Turn page]

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scowl to Stafford's brows. It also brought a disagreeable cold lump to the pit of his stomach where it began to bounce around. Why cold fear suddenly started rippling through him, he didn't know. All he did know was that Baker was in that second plane—and somebody else was in Tracey's plane. Perhaps what caused the fear was the fact he had no idea who was in the first plane.

"And Baker!" he muttered aloud, and increased the pressure of the hand he held jammed against the already wide-open throttle. "He looked as if he'd bailed out with no chute. Or had walked into a revving prop. But—but why is either of them headed out this way?"

The question seemed to hang in the air waiting for the answer that wouldn't, and couldn't, come off his lips. Then suddenly he saw the leading plane start seaward like a meteor in high gear. At practically the same instant Baker dropped his nose and went cutting down.

And, though Stafford couldn't tell for sure because of the distance and the thundering of his own Pratt and Whitney, it seemed as though Baker had started blasting away with all his guns at the leading Grumman. On impulse Stafford pulled his gaze down to the surface of the water, and let out a wild yell.

There, her knife bow slicing the shimmering swells, was the *Wright*, laced by the golden dawn sunlight. A majestic thing of painted gold sliding up out of the east. Stafford's heart skipped a beat at the sheer beauty of the war craft making for port.

An instant later, though, his heart practically stood still as he saw, a mile or so to starboard of the *Wright*, the T-Wharf fishing boat *Sally Jane*. Stafford rubbed his eyes hard, swallowed a couple of times, and took another look.

The picture was still the same. There was the *Wright*, to starboard was the *Sally Jane*, and diving full out to port of the carrier were two Grummans from Twenty-six. Like a man turned to stone Stafford stared unwinking as the first Grumman came sweeping down lower and lower, and

(Turn to page 92)

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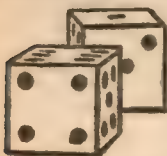
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SAILORS LAST FOREVER

(Continued from page 90)

the Grumman with Baker in the pit piled down after it with all guns blazing.

Suddenly Baker's guns stopped short as though they had jammed. But by now he was but a few yards from the tail of the first Grumman that was pulling up out of its dive at no more than seventy-five feet over the water and streaking straight for the Wright.

COLD fear gripped Stafford and he tried to yell into his flap mike, but his stiff lips could form no sound. Then he saw the torpedo drop from Baker's plane, and hit the water at a crazy angle. The release of the torpedo added speed to Baker's ship and in a flash he was but a few feet from the tail fin of the other Grumman.

"That fishing boat! Get her! There's probably a German U—"

The voice that barked in Stafford's earphones, and was cut off sharply, belonged to Baker. Stafford heard it as though in a dream. And then he saw Baker's plane crash full out into the leading Grumman.

At the same instant the torpedo dropped from the belly of the leading

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Grumman, but the crash had swerved the plane crazily, and the torpedo hit the water and headed for a point a good quarter of a mile astern of the Wright. Then the two planes locked wings, only for an instant.

Perhaps Baker had hauled his nose up a split second before the crash, or perhaps the hands of the kind gods reached down and hauled the nose up for him after the contact. At any rate the tangled mess of wreckage, all that was left of Baker's plane, tore free of the other ship and went zooming some seven hundred feet into the sky.

As it wavered at the top of its zoom, Stafford saw something spill outward and down. It blossomed out into the silk envelope of a parachute, and Baker's figure swayed back and forth at the ends of the shroud lines.

The first Grumman didn't zoom at all. It mushed forward for perhaps fifty yards, then dropped and hit the water to disappear in a fountain of frothy foam and shimmering spray.

"What—"

Stafford's words were killed by the sudden thunder of sound off to the north. He jerked his head that way just in time to see flaming pieces of the Sally Jane go flying sky-high. But

[Turn page]

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he also saw something else that made his brain feel as though it were going to explode inside his head.

For a brief instant the bow of a German U-boat pushed upward out of the flame and smoke where the *Sally Jane* had been, then slid back into the inferno, never to be seen again. The faint white wake of a speeding torpedo that led straight to the inferno was the answer to the question that rose to Stafford's lips. The torpedo dropped by the first Grumman had missed the *Wright* and had sped on to crash into the *Sally Jane*—and a German U-boat for which she served as a shield while it had been sneaking up on the unsuspecting aircraft carrier.

"It's a cockeyed dream!" Stafford muttered and watched a tender put off from the *Wright* and head for Baker bobbing in the water beside the floating silk folds of his parachute. "It can't be anything else!"

AT NOON that day three men sat in the officers' wardroom aboard the Carrier *Wright* as she rode at anchor off the Charleston Navy Yard. One was Lieutenant Commander Stafford. One was Vice Admiral Allen, chief of Naval Aviation Intelligence. And the third was Lieutenant Baker.

The Twenty-six Squadron replacement was garbed in sick bay clothes, and there was a lot of surgeon's tape and bandage on his person. On his lips there was a good-natured and half apologetic smile as he nodded at Stafford's dumbfounded expression.

"That's right, sir," he said. "I was assigned to Twenty-six for Intelligence duty, actually. The blow-hard act is simply a quick way I get myself shunned so that I can move around and not be noticed much. But . . . Well, this time things happened so fast I could have left out my little entrance act. Matter of fact, they darn near happened too fast. I'd no sooner started to grope around in the dark than the whole business practically blew up in my face."

"A rat Nazi spy one of my Radio Operations men?" Stafford muttered with a shake of his head. "It—it's hard to believe."

"War's full of little surprises,"

Baker said, with a faint smile. "I didn't have any idea who he was when Vice Admiral Allen sent me up here. We only knew that news of ship movements off these shores was leaking out of some place around here. U-boats have been getting too darn many ships off the Atlantic coast recently, as you well know. That the leak might be here seemed possible because of the many patrols you make, and the amount of information regarding ships sighted contained in your flight reports.

"Anyway, this base seemed a good place to start digging around. Then, right off the bat, that Radio Operations request to investigate what turned out to be a T-Wharf fishing boat. The type you've probably sighted a hundred times on patrol. That request struck me funny. How did Operations know she was out there? Who had reported her to them? And was that request maybe a code message that would be picked up by other ears?

"I faked engine trouble and beat it back to a point on the coast where I could contact Area Intelligence Headquarters, and got them to start working on the T-Wharf end of things. In the last war, you know, more than one fishing boat, or tramp, was a screen for a U-boat sneaking up for the kill.

"Well, I had decided to let you in on things, when that message about meeting the *Wright* came in. That worried me. She was really something to sink. I was still in the dark, and my only hope was to watch Radio Operations. A wild stab, but it paid off.

"Just after midnight I saw the second operator, Miller, sneaking off. He led me to a short-wave set hidden in a shack some five miles south of the base. He made radio contact with somebody, and then *he surprised me!* He knocked me kicking, but I managed to get back to the base not far behind him.

"The rest you saw. I guess he decided to make doubly sure the *Wright* would go down. Well, my shooting wasn't so good, and my guns jammed. The only thing left was to ram him before he could release his torpedo. A lucky break, or maybe justice. His

[Turn page]

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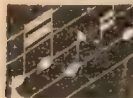
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went wide of the Wright, and smacked the Sally Jane and the U-boat hiding behind her. Yeah! Luck, or justice—thank God!"

"It—it's still like a cockeyed dream!" Stafford murmured and licked his lips. "And all the time we thought you were— Well, we certainly were dopes, Baker. And we hope you'll overlook it and stick around."

Baker laughed and shook his head.

"Not this old has-been," he said. "You kids fly too hard and too often for these forty-one years. Nope. I'll stick with Intelligence where I only have to fly hard once a week, and maybe not that often. No, Stafford. You youngsters go out and slap the Axis tramps down for good. Us oldsters will just carry the ball whenever we can—as long as we last."

FIRST COMMAND

(Concluded from page 79)

It made good reading.

"Take his picture and don't bother with us," Lieutenant Brack said to the photographers. "Snap the guy who brought us down. His hydraulic gear was smashed and his engines were dead but he brought that crate in. Stacey, I mean. Through the worst fog I ever saw."

"Now look here," Stacey protested. "This guy—"

"One question, Lieutenant," the wing commander said. "You had quite a time of it under the ether, Brack. While they dug that bullet out of you, you kept talking about a guy named Stinky. You said—"

"A lot of things can happen when a guy is in a fog, sir," the bombardier grinned and shot a glance at Stacey. "Can't they, Skipper?"

"Yeah, Stin—Lieutenant," Stacey said. "They sure can."

He turned away from the bed and made out that he had something to say to the nurse. A wing commander has to know a lot to get where he is—but he does not have to know everything.

Beware! Loose Talk Can Cost Lives!

Power Without Horses

Uncle Sam is going all-out on gliders—men are needed!

THE United States Army is now going all-out on gliders. The deadly technique of landing companies, regiments and even full divisions of men silently from the sky which the Germans used so successfully in Crete last year is to be turned against them when the great invasion of Europe finally gets under way.

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As this force—exact numbers, naturally cannot be given—is planned to number about a hundred thousand men, the field is wide open. Here are the qualifications for membership:

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He must be in reasonably good condition—though the bars are a bit lower than for the regular Air Forces—reasonably well educated and intelligent and must be up to Army requirements. He will be given training, first at a CAA school on light planes with emphasis on dead stick landings, then get down to intensive training with gliders themselves.

Those who graduate successfully, be they civilians or Army men, will be given at least staff sergeant's rating with full flight pay. And, as it is a new service, commissions are going to come more rapidly than in other services at least until officer ranks are filled.

As we just said, it's a man's job and a great privilege—a chance to get in the first whacks at the Axis—and the rewards are great. Let's go, fellows, Keep 'em gliding!

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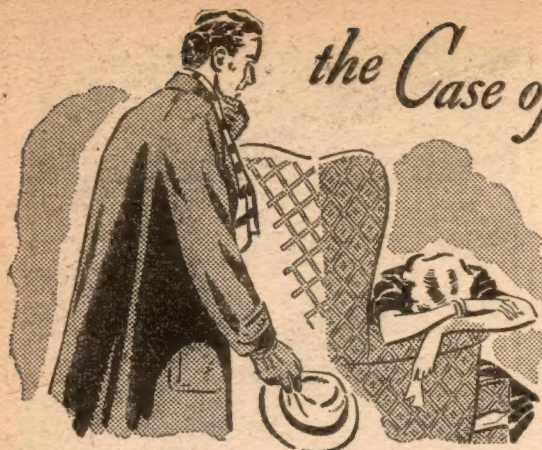
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the Case of the Crying Wife

1 Ann doesn't cry easily—but that night I found her in tears! "I can't help it," she sobbed. "All the things we were going to do—buy a car, build a home—remember? And here we are—married three years, and just barely making ends meet! I thought our dreams might come true—but it's no use." I made up my mind right then to "have it out" with the boss.



2 "Look here!" he said. "I can't pay you more unless you're *worth* more! And frankly, John, you lack the *training* a bigger job needs. Ever hear of the International Correspondence Schools?"



3 When I learned the boss was a former I.C.S. student, I signed up *quick*! And what a difference it made in my work! I'd never realized until then how *little* I knew about the business.



4 I'm happy, and Ann's happy, and I guess the boss is happy. (At least I've had two "raises" in the last year!) And here's the very same coupon that I mailed, staring you in the face!

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